

# WHITETAIL SPECIAL

# Bowhunter®

THE #1 BOWHUNTING MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015

*Mike Mettler and the  
194½ SD dream buck  
he named KONG.*

## KONG!

### 2014's TOP TYPICAL

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USE MOON POSITION TO  
**SCORE ON  
BIG BUCKS**

## HOW TO READ THE RUT

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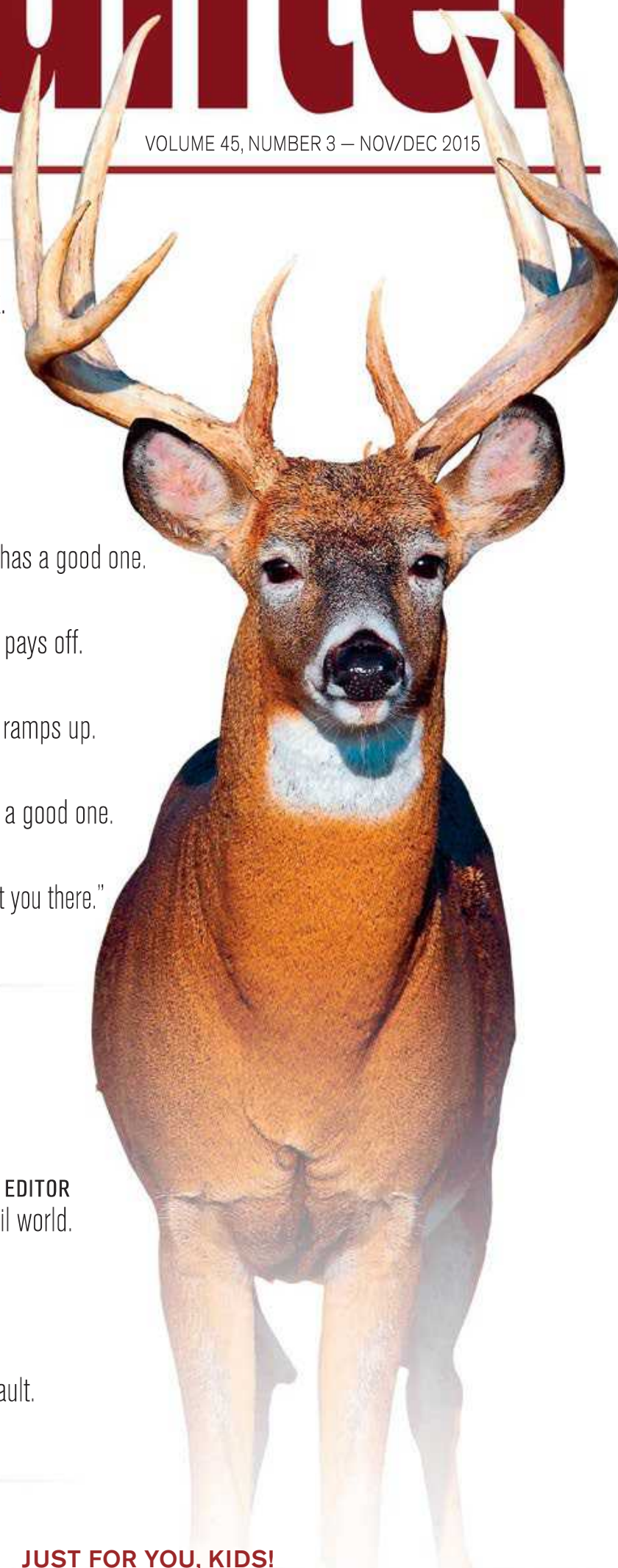
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*Photo of Doug Easton's 1940 Deer Hunt*



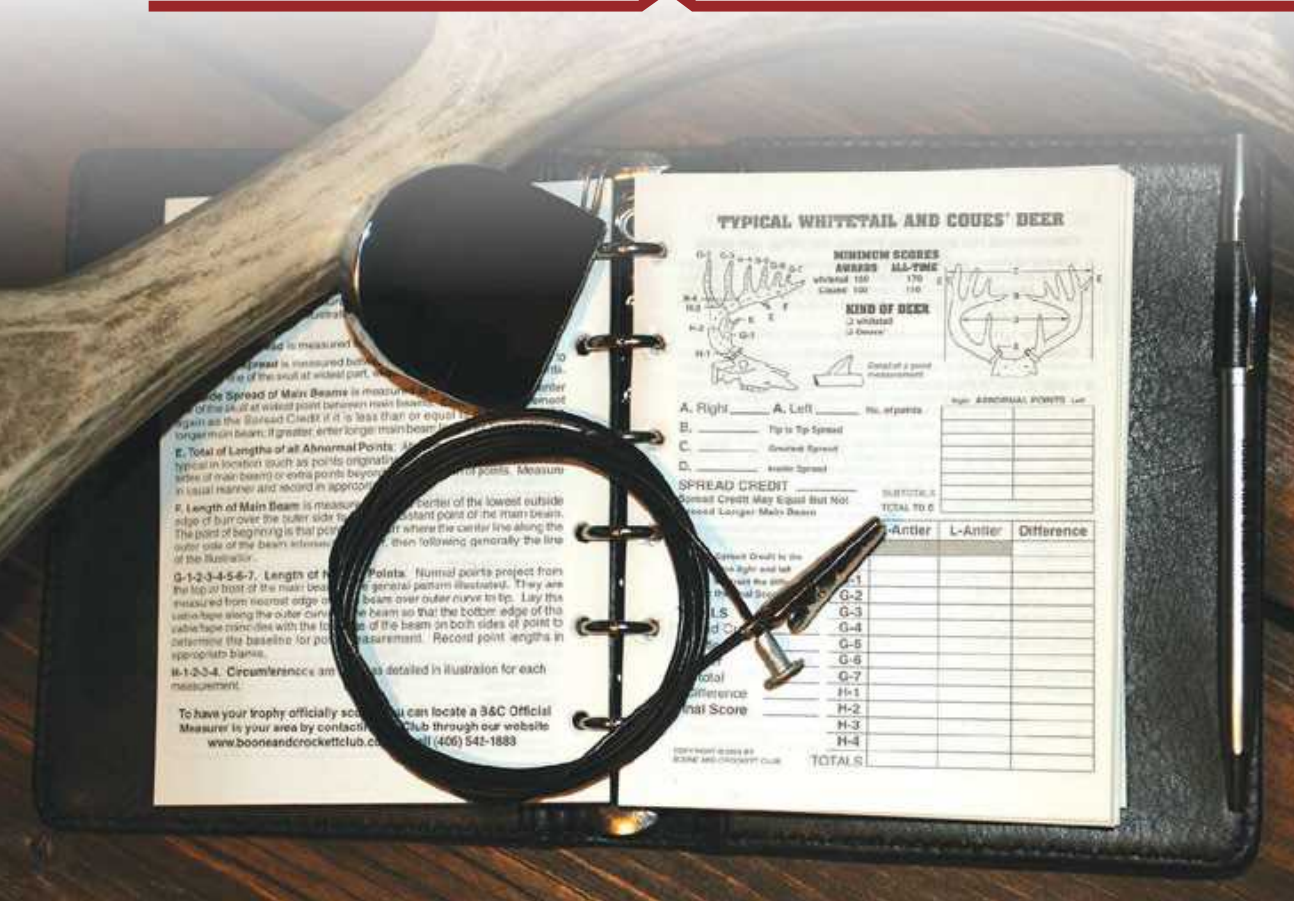
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## TALKING SCORE

By Curt Wells, Editor

The vast majority of our readers are whitetail hunters. Some bowhunt whitetails exclusively; others hunt multiple species of big game. But if you've spent more than a few hours hunting whitetails, you're a whitetail hunter to some degree. In this, our annual *Whitetail Special*, we focus on a spectacular, challenging game animal we often take for granted, probably because they are so numerous and accessible.

Our cover features a magnificent South Dakota buck, taken by Mike Mettler. We believe this may be the largest typical buck taken in North America in 2014. The buck's net antler score is 194½. In our research, we could not find a larger 2014 typical buck. The cover of our last issue was graced by the largest nontypical whitetail buck of 2014 — as far as we know. The Mark Hammer Buck scored 254½.

Yes, a larger buck in either category could have been taken last year. Not every buck is officially scored. But these monsters eventually surface somewhere. We could be wrong, but we think we've brought you the stories of North America's two largest whitetails, taken with any weapon, from last year.

As we seek out these special animals, we unearth lots of claims of antler scores that are carelessly thrown around. The vast majority are gross scores, or the total measured antler before deductions for symmetry. I don't have a huge problem with gross scores and, in fact, the Pope and Young Club is studying the concept of listing gross scores with the final net scores in their record book. I would be in favor of that change, but the fact remains that the net score is the final score. Gross is not.

Because of the inherent ambiguity, gross scores get abused. The wild claims I see on television shows are a perfect example. Bucks touted to be "160-class" would eventually score in the 140 range. Many outfitters use gross scores almost exclusively. Why not? Everyone likes bigger numbers, right? The bad news is, they send successful clients home with unreasonable expectations and false hopes. When the official measurer crunches the numbers, the hunter is now disappointed, and the measurer or the scoring system takes the blame. "Nets are for fish!" they say.

Some feel a buck should get credit for all the antler he has grown. That sounds logical, and you would think that is what the nontypical category is for. However, there are

still deductions for lack of symmetry in that category. My apologies to the founders of the scoring system, but I never understood the logic of deductions on a set of antlers entered in the nontypical category.

I am, however, on board with the typical scoring system. There's something to be said for symmetry and a set of antlers or horns that conform to the "intended" natural design. The Mel Johnson buck, the current World Record typical bowkill, is a shining example of the validity of the scoring system. Mel Johnson's typical 6x6 buck was killed in 1965, and in the 50 years since (anniversary is October 29), despite millions of bowhunters expending countless hours managing and hunting for big whitetail bucks, no one has tagged a buck with the same combination of length, spread, mass, and symmetry as the Johnson buck. The fact that this buck has stood the test of time, when so many are trying to best it, tells me the scoring system is valid. Make no mistake. Mel Johnson's buck will eventually be dethroned, but it will take a magnificent specimen to get it done. And it will deserve the number-one spot.

Also, keep in mind that the P&Y Club, which was born in 1961, did not create the scoring system. They adopted the Boone and Crockett Club's system, which was created in 1950 by Grancel Fitz and fellow committee members. Those drafters of the system had a difficult challenge, because no matter what scoring rules were devised, it would not satisfy everyone. There was bound to be disagreement. There was, still is, and always will be.

A good example is the system for scoring caribou. I'm pretty sure Fitz and the boys must have had a few shots of brandy the day they came up with those rules, because they are not consistent with the rules for all other antlered game. Despite that diversion, they had to settle on a system and run with it. We can't go back and change the rules now.

A net score is *the* score. If there weren't deductions for symmetry, a buck with a giant left antler and a deformed right antler would outscore a perfectly conformed buck with a great net score. If you're the hunter with the symmetrical buck, you're not going to take kindly to such a system.

A faultless scoring system does not exist. The original intent of the scoring system creators was to honor the animal — not the hunter. That intent was righteous, and should remain so. <<<



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## RUT CALLS

*By Tony J. Peterson, Equipment Editor*

**S**everal years ago, I sat on a ridge watching for cruising bucks as the wind blew past my stand and over a ravine cut deep into a hillside. Halloween had just passed, colorful leaves were losing their grip with each breath of wind, and it was starting to get really interesting in the woods. As the evening slipped away, I had yet to see a deer, when deep into an oak flat I caught sight of a deer walking. With only

a few minutes of daylight left to spare, I snort-wheezed in its direction. The deer stopped, so I snort-wheezed again.

Immediately, the deer turned in my direction and started running straight at my tree. When he hit the 20-yard mark, it became clear that the buck sported about 25 inches of antler on his spindly forkhorn rack. What he lacked in size, he made up for in attitude in a similar manner to the way a fluffy little throw pillow of a dog will growl at a much bigger canine without truly weighing the consequences. What was even cooler to see than a 1½-year-old buck barreling in was the 140-inch buck I didn't know was behind him that quickly charged onto the scene. What was really, really uncool to see was my arrow slipping over that buck's back as I cleanly missed him for no reason other than I totally blew it.

Since that encounter, I've snort-wheezed at a pile of bucks, and in so doing I've found that most of what I thought I knew about the snort-wheeze wasn't true and that often the opposite was true. Snort-wheezing is not solely a dominant-buck call, and it's not only effective during the heat of the rut. It works all season long, on all sizes of bucks. Not all bucks, mind you, but far more than conventional wisdom suggests.

The same can be said for grunts, rattling, and bleating. They all work, and they'll work on bucks all season long. But these sounds can also spook deer and clear the woods in a hurry. Knowing when to call, what to call with, and how to proceed after making initial vocal contact are all things that are nearly impossible to explain to someone. A deer's body language, the condition of the woods, and something that hums far deeper in the rhythms of the natural world all play into successful calling. There is no way to be good at it consistently without plenty of trial and error on live deer.

Fortunately, while there are no guarantees in the world of trying to sweet-talk a buck into range, there are plenty of calls out there that will help you say the right things, and that's a good start. Personally, even though I don't grunt, bleat or rattle much, I always carry the means to do so. Like I said, you never know when the wind will lay down, or the temperature will drop, and it will just feel right.

For any calling, it's best to develop a personal set of rules from those times





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Duel Game Calls  
Stretchback Grunt Call

when things go right, and just as importantly, when they don't. Where you hunt, just how many hunters are competing with you for the deer, and the overall number of deer in your hunting area can all affect how well calling works. Pay attention to what happens every time you engage in a blind calling sequence, as well as those times when you call to a deer you can see. Trust the buck's body language to help you make your own calling rules every time, and you'll suddenly find that at certain times you'll be reaching for the grunt call or the rattling antlers without even thinking about it, instead of cringing every time you call for fear of spooking deer, seen or unseen.

One of my go-to calls as of late comes from **Flextone Game Calls**. Their new **Headhunter Extractor** (\$23) features a glide button that slides into position to switch between pretty much every sound a buck, doe, or fawn is likely to make. This freeze-free call also features a snort-wheelie chamber and a flexible throat tube to increase tonal quality of each call and add ever-important inflection to your faux deer speak. This is a great call for minimalist hunters who wish to carry only one call yet be able to speak to all members of the deer herd.

**Duel Game Calls** also offers up an excellent option in their **Stretchback Grunt Call** (\$33). To create the sound of a chasing buck, this call is designed with a rubber flex tube that allows you to instantly change the sound of the call simply by extending the tube, which easily stretches and retracts without making a sound (unlike plastic flexible tubes, which can make a lot of noise on a dead-calm day). The Stretchback also boasts a FreezeFree design, so that you'll be able to call effectively even if it's booger-freezing cold on stand.

The **Rubline Grunter Call** (\$20) from **Hunter's Specialties** also gives you the ability to coax-in distant bucks thanks

A large advertisement for OL'MAN OUTDOORS featuring a hunter in a tree stand. The text 'THE DRONE' is prominently displayed in the center. The background is a black and white photo of a hunter in a tree stand, looking up. The OL'MAN OUTDOORS logo is in the top left. The text 'THE DRONE' is in the center. On the right, there is a description of the tree stand. In the bottom left, there are three small inset images: a tree stand, a person using a tree stand, and a tree stand with a quiver. The text 'HEX-DRIVE' is below the first inset, and 'ACCESSORY HANGERS & QUIVER HOLDERS' is below the third inset. The website 'OLMANOUTDOORS.COM' is at the bottom right.

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to its quiet flexible tube, which allows you to easily alter calling directions and dupe even the wariest of Booners. The Rubline Grunter Call can produce soft, young buck-sounding grunts, or deeper (and louder) king-of-the-deciduous-forest calls meant to mimic the toughest bucks in any territory.

One name that definitely stands out in the calling arena is **Primos Hunting**. This company has churned out a pile of quality calls for elk, deer, turkeys, and other game

over the years. Fortunately for all whitetail hunters, this year they've released the **Rut Roar** (\$18) — a truly loud, realistic-sounding grunter. Create everything from soft tending grunts to a roar with this call, and if necessary, toss out a snort-wheeze. To ensure bucks don't pin you down in the tree, this call is even designed with an angled outlet for directional calling that says, "I'm a buck on the ground right here, not a human sitting up in a tree waiting to decrease your lung capacity."

Built to the specs of a live buck's throat, the **Deer THUGS Brawler** (\$27) from **Quaker Boy** is a great option to stash in your pack any time you target whitetails. This call uses a bellows and reverse-cone sound chamber to create all kinds of deer calls, from low tending grunts to loud and aggressive contact grunts.

From about October 20 until the first week of November, there seems to be a window where bucks are more susceptible to rattling. Those same bucks are far

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Last but not least, **Knight & Hale** calls have accounted for a pile of notched tags over the years, and their latest — the **EZ Grunter Xtreme** (\$15) — is certain to account for plenty more. Each EZ Grunter Xtreme features a patented HyperVentilator inhale/exhale operation style and a reed that locks into place, which allows you to return your call to factory specs should you get a little crazy experimenting with different tones. <<<

#### Manufacturer's Contact List:

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From 2003–2013, buck harvests declined by 8%, and 21 of 33 states shot fewer bucks in 2013.

ONCE AGAIN THE SOUTHEAST DEER STUDY GROUP PROVES THERE'S STILL A LOT TO BE LEARNED ABOUT WHITETAIL DEER.

## DEER MANAGEMENT 2015

*By Dr. Dave Samuel, Conservation Editor*

For the very latest scientific information on deer, the single best place to go is the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Deer Study Group. This meeting is attended by all the deer biologists, deer professors, and deer research graduate students in the country, and the 38<sup>th</sup> such meeting was held earlier this year in Little Rock, Arkansas. The hosts were the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and, as usual, **Bowhunter** was there.

The wide array of topics covered at this particular meeting was fantastic — impacts of coyotes, disease updates, deer-movement data, deer in towns, what impacts buck harvest, antlers and nutrition, auto collisions, etc. Without further adieu, let's get to the meeting.

Kip Adams presented his Quality Deer Management Association data showing 10-year trends in deer harvests. From 2003–2013, buck harvests declined by 8%, and 21 of 33 states shot fewer bucks in 2013. The biggest drop was the Midwest region, with an 18% decrease in buck harvest and a 20% decrease in doe harvest in 2013. Pope and Young and Boone and Crockett Club entries from the Midwest were also down substantially in 2013. Midwest deer harvest declines were caused by several things, including intentional management, EHD outbreaks, two bad winters in a row, drought, habitat loss, and lower fawn recruitment. Of interest is the loss of 9.1 million acres of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) habitat from 2007–2013, as this land was converted to corn production. That's a huge 25% of all CRP lands, with six million acres lost in the Midwest alone.

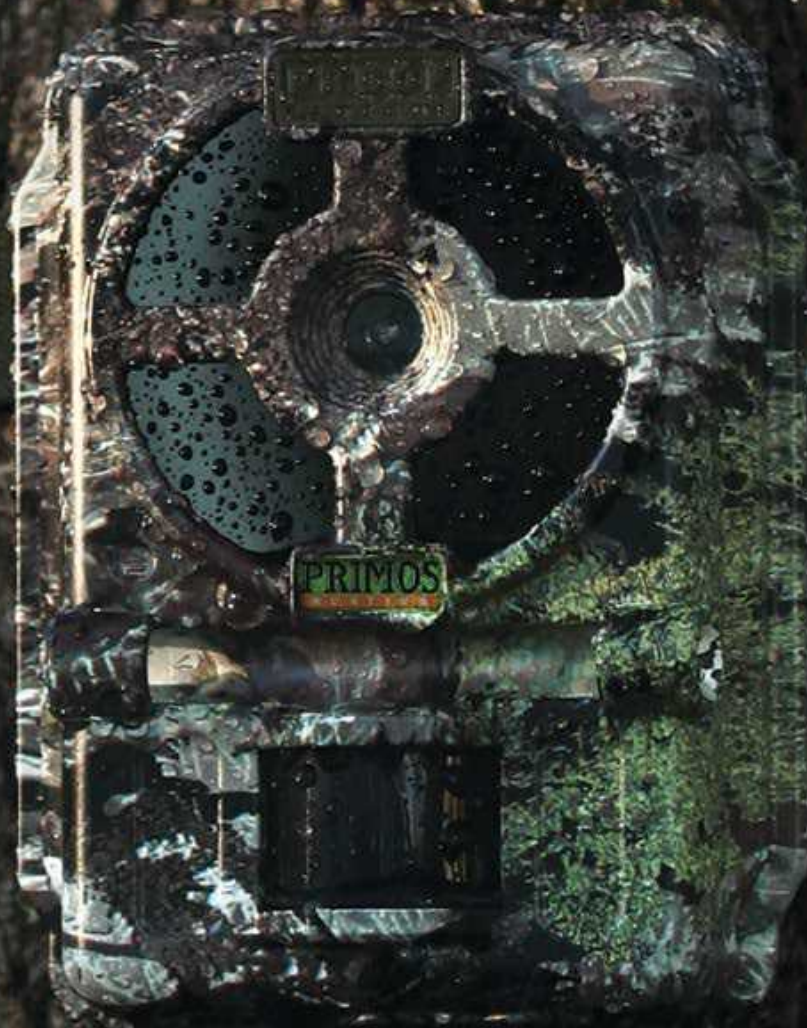
**Interest in diseases continue.** Dr. John Fischer, of the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, updated us on chronic wasting disease. In the last year, CWD was found for the first time in the wild in Iowa, and in captive herds in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Federal and state regulations state that if a farm is CWD “certified-free” for five years, then deer can be moved from state to state. Those regulations do not necessarily control CWD on deer farms listed as having “low-risk” herds, as deer from such farms shipped to several states led to outbreaks of CWD. Dr. Fischer also noted that a vaccine trial study showed promise but had a long way to go before implementation in the wild.

**Coyote problems growing.** Colter Chitwood, of North Carolina State University, looked at the impacts of coyotes on deer. He found that for low-density deer populations with heavy coyote/fawn predation, lowering hunter harvest of adult does is *not* the best solution, but coyote removal is. However, since removing enough coyotes is probably not possible, managers may have to start with reductions in adult doe harvest. Not a pleasant thought for hunters, but

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this is the reality of the situation in some areas.

Mike Conner and cohorts at the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center also considered the coyote/fawn predation problem. They noted that coyote removal on small parcels of land is very difficult, and used a computer model to simulate the impacts of construction of four 100-acre exclosures to keep coyotes out. They determined that such exclusion of coyotes “provided an additional 20 recruits/year above that expected without exclusion.” This assumes that pregnant does will favor the use of such exclosures during fawning season. I’m not sure how realistic it is to construct coyote-proof pens for fawn protection, but it is an interesting thought.

Chad Williamson, a Ball State University researcher, compared fawn survival in urban and rural areas in Indiana. They put radio collars on 119 fawns in 2013 and 2014, and looked at survival for their first 32 weeks of life. They found that the probability of survival increased

as the density of homes at birth sites increased. In the rural areas, there was 40% survival at 32 weeks, and in the suburbs and urban areas the survival was 60%. They added that there was more coyote predation in rural areas.

***We’ve got a lot to learn about deer movements.*** We know that some yearling bucks disperse from their birthing home ranges and never return. We also know that bucks of all ages go on excursions, leaving their home ranges for a relatively short time, and then returning. Matt Springer, from Southern Illinois University, examined this behavior, placing GPS collars on 61 juvenile deer in east-central Illinois. He found that dispersal rates were higher for bucks than does, with most dispersals taking place in the fall. Excursion rates were also higher for bucks than does, and doe excursions increased in the fall. Although one deer made five excursions, most made two or three. The author suggested that spring excursions may be to look for food after winter, but he also suggested that some individuals might just be more mobile than others.

Taylor Simoneaux examined older

buck (2.5 years and older) home ranges and excursions in Louisiana. He found a great variation in annual home-range size (421–6,615 acres), seasonal home-range size (208–3,406 acres), and weekly home-range size (17–655 acres). He found large individual variation in rates of excursions. Some bucks also used two separate home ranges on a week-by-week basis during the hunting season, which may explain why that buck you were hunting disappeared for a while. One conclusion of this study was that bucks are very individualistic relative to the distance they move and how often they move. Clearly, there is a lot we don’t know about movements and excursions.

***Bait study won’t help hunters.*** Baiting is becoming more and more common throughout the whitetail’s range, and a poster study was presented for research done in Illinois that compared the attraction of different baits. This was done to aid in studies where deer need to be captured and/or surveyed by trail cameras, but results would also apply to hunter-used baits. From September to December, they put trail cameras on four bait stations (two with corn/

Bucks of all ages go on excursions, leaving their home ranges for a relatively short time, and then returning.





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## DEER MANAGEMENT 2015

sugar-based baits, and two fruit-based baits) located 50 yards apart. This study showed there was no difference found in the attractiveness of these different baits.

**Acorn study will help hunters.** For you acorn lovers, researchers at North Carolina State University compared acorn production and attractiveness for white oak acorns and sawtooth oak acorns. They followed acorn production of 30 white oaks and 30 sawtooth oaks for two years, and they also put out both species of acorns in front of cameras to see which ones the deer preferred. Sawtooth peak production was four weeks earlier than white oaks, but production was two weeks shorter than white oaks. White oaks outproduced sawtooths by nearly double in their best year. And here is the clincher. Deer ate all the white oak acorns before eating sawtooth acorns at bait sites. The only advantage of sawtooths was that they had consistent production from year to year. So here we have another study showing that deer love those white oak acorns.

**Does body size impact buck breeding?** Chad Newbolt at Auburn Univer-

sity looked at seven years of data from their 430-acre Alabama enclosure. In that large pen, age did not impact the number of times a buck sired a doe, nor did antler size. But body size did. However, all ages of bucks bred does, so culling inferior bucks will have little effect on genetics. Now, does the same thing happen in the wild? Not sure.

**What type of antler restrictions work best?** Obviously, we can improve male age structure by using antler-size restrictions. But what antler restrictions work best? William Gulsby and cohorts from the University of Georgia looked at 10 years of antler and harvest data from 11 Georgia wildlife-management areas, and found that 2.5 and 3.5-year-old bucks harvested under the most restrictive criteria (16-inch beam length or 15-inch inside spread) had larger antlers than those harvested under either a four-points-on-one-side restriction, or no selective criteria. Once bucks got to age 4.5-plus, there was no difference. They also found that the 15-inch spread protected more of the 2.5 and 3.5-year-old bucks than the four-points-on-a-side restriction. Overall, there wasn't much difference, because the 15-inch ear-to-ear spread protected 35% of

3.5-year-old bucks and 13% of 4.5 year olds, while the four-points-on-a-side restriction protected 19% of 3.5-year-old bucks and 11% of 4.5-year-old bucks. Other studies show that inside spread protects more yearling bucks than four points on a side, so I still go with antler spread as the best way to protect young bucks. However, some education for the hunters is needed when you use spread over points on a side.

To emphasize that, Chad Dacus and Chris McDonald, from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, presented some history of what they've used on antler restrictions on state wildlife-management areas. In 1995, a four-point rule was implemented, but after some research was done, that was eliminated in 2008 in favor of antler spread.

Year after year, the Southeast Deer Study Group meeting teaches us all more about the great deer we love. Next February this meeting, which is open to the public, will be hosted by the North Carolina wildlife agency. Check out their website and join **Bowhunter** Magazine at the 2016 Southeast Deer Study Group meeting. You will not be disappointed. <<<



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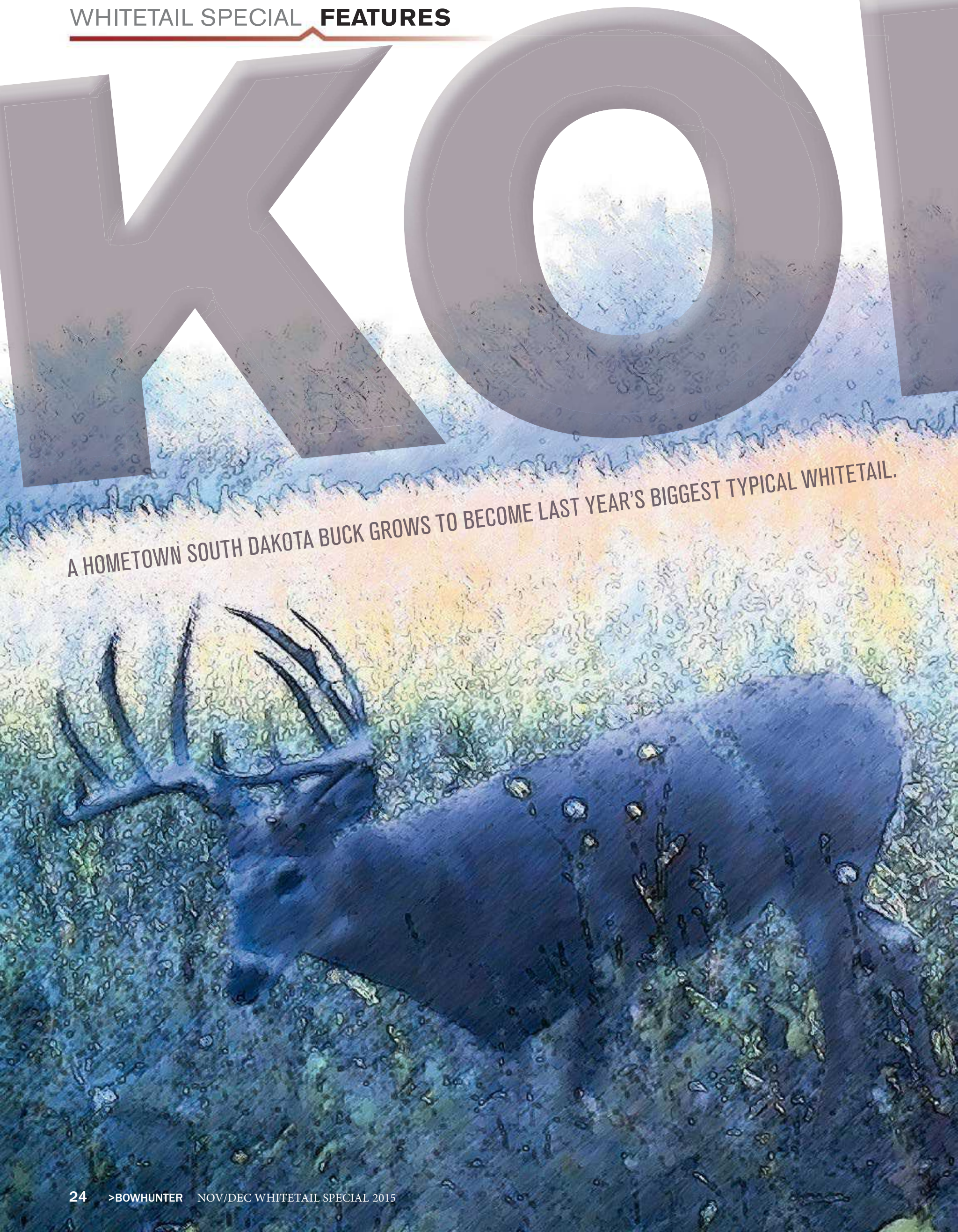
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A HOMETOWN SOUTH DAKOTA BUCK GROWS TO BECOME LAST YEAR'S BIGGEST TYPICAL WHITETAIL.





**COVER STORY**

**M**Y STORY of a very special whitetail buck begins in the fall of 2013. I didn't have much of an opportunity to go bowhunting that fall due to a project of tearing rocks out of 100 acres of sod. What I thought was going to take about one week to complete ended up taking me five weeks. It was tough knowing the rut was in full swing, and I couldn't even find time to get my trail cameras out. By the time the rifle season opened, the ground had finally frozen, and I was able to get out and do some hunting.

**BY MIKE METTLER**





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## KONG!

Surprisingly, I wasn't seeing a whole lot of movement. About halfway through the season, I was driving down a gravel road, when a guy waved me down and asked, "Are you after the big buck?"

Not knowing anything about any big buck, I replied, "I guess I am always after big bucks."

That's when the guy showed me several trail camera photos of the buck he was referring to. Evidently this deer had been coming into one of my cornfields, and I



The guy who flagged me down on the road showed me several photos of Kong, including this one that shows him entering one of the cornfields on my property.

knew nothing about it. From that moment on I was hunting only for that one buck, and dedicated the remainder of the season to looking for him. Throughout the rest of the season I saw him only once, and he was on our neighbor's property where I didn't have permission to hunt.

After the season, I searched for the buck every now and then just to determine if he had survived the gun season. One blizzard-like day in early January, I spotted him with a group of 75 deer. This time he was on our property, so I was very relieved to know I would be able to focus on hunting him in the fall.

I didn't see the buck throughout the summer, but in early September I put out my trail cameras and was very surprised to get photos of the buck the very first time I pulled my cards. The buck had really blown up and was huge. Instead of just calling him "that big buck," I named him "Kong."

My trail cameras eventually revealed the huge deer was coming into one of my food plots at least every other night. This was a bit surprising to me, considering he was leaving some very nice, well-managed property just northeast of me. On opening day of pheasant season, I sat on stand the whole day thinking that all the bird-hunting pressure would bump Kong out of his bed and push him past my food plot and waterhole. It seemed like a good plan, but I did not see a single deer that day.

Winter decided to set in early, bringing snow along with some brutally cold temps. I saw Kong a handful of times. Once was on a foggy morning, and he was with a small buck and two does. I tried to stalk him, but 150 yards was as close as I could get. He continued to show up on my cameras, normally walking by them

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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**KONG!**



This trail cam photo was taken October 25, 2014. You can really get a good look at his long G-2s as he strolled past my camera around 10:40 p.m.

between midnight and 4 a.m. Except, that is, for October 29, the day my daughter, Sadie, was born. On that day, my camera caught the buck walking right by my stand during the last 15 minutes of legal shooting light. Seeing the photo, I thought that might have been my only chance at the buck and I had missed it — for an extremely good reason, of course.

The day my wife, Liza, and I brought Sadie home from the hospital, we got to the house at 1 p.m., and an hour later I was sitting in a treestand. I knew I was pushing it a little, but my wife was gracious enough to say, “Go get him.”

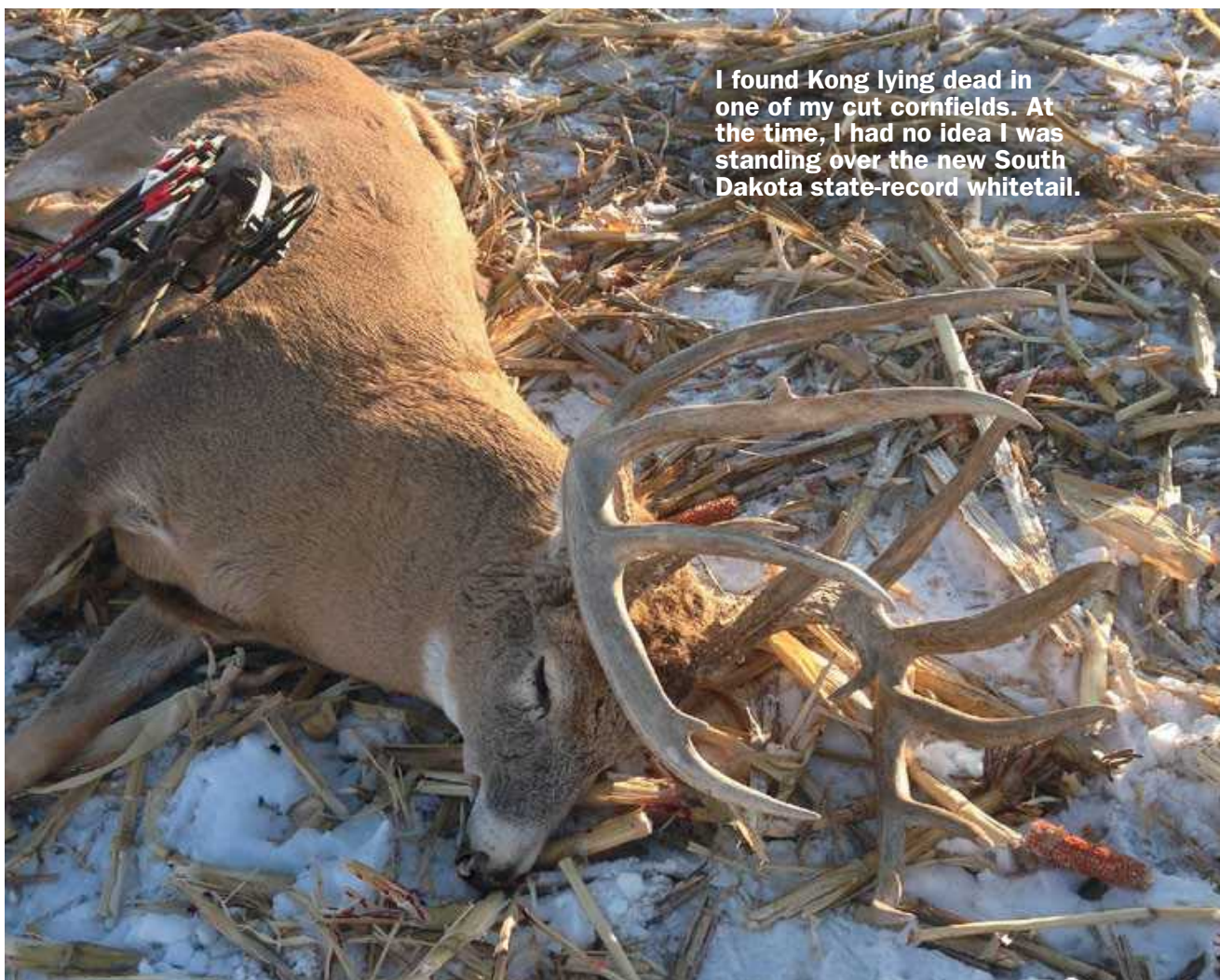
For the next five or six days, I saw no sign of Kong in the field or on camera. At that point I was becoming concerned he may have moved out of the area. It was now the last week before rifle season, so I decided to stick with it and hunt hard for the buck. If unsuccessful, I would go after him with the rifle. I knew that it would be a whole different ball-

game then, as rifle season always intensifies the pressure.

On November 17, I went to help my father and brother-in-law move their cattle home. We got done early in the afternoon, and at first I wasn't sure whether or not I would go out that night. But by this time in the season it was almost automatic for me to get in a tree, so off I went.

I walked to my stand, and as I climbed the tree, I noticed my waterhole was now frozen over. I needed another plan. Since it was breezy enough that the wind would cover any noise I would make, I decided I would stalk through my food plot of standing corn. Stalking through cornrows is one of my favorite things to do.

It wasn't long before I spotted a doe standing up and eating corn in the rows, so I had to be careful not to get busted. I managed to slip past the doe, and made it another four rows over from her. That's when I spotted the top of a rack between the rows. This cornfield had a



I found Kong lying dead in one of my cut cornfields. At the time, I had no idea I was standing over the new South Dakota state-record whitetail.





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## KONG!



My trail camera images of Kong really didn't do justice to his tine length, especially his G-2s, which were over 15 inches long!

lot of volunteer corn from the previous year and was thick, almost like cattails, so the buck was mostly hidden.

I wanted to get a little closer, but I had to be careful of the doe. Every now and then she would glance over in my direction, so I decided to hold tight and hope the buck would eventually stand up.

It seemed like an eternity, and all sorts of thoughts were racing through my mind. After about 40 minutes, the doe started to gradually walk away. At that point the buck stood up, and that was when buck fever kicked into high gear. It was Kong!

Anyone who has hunted in standing corn has had an arrow deflect off a cornstalk at some point. It's always tricky to get a clean shot off. Somehow I managed to get my release hooked onto my D-loop, but only after one missed attempt. Kong was now quartering away, so I carefully drew my bow, released the arrow, and immediately heard that wonderful sound of broadhead meeting hide.

I tried to look through my binocu-

lars, but to be honest, I was shaking so bad it just wasn't possible. I waited for what felt like forever to begin looking for the buck. Kong wasn't bleeding that much, only spots here and there, so following his line of travel was difficult. I looked and looked in the food plot, and could not find the buck. So I hiked back to my pickup and drove around the section, which was either corn or barley that I'd already harvested, to see if I could spot him.

As I drove south, I noticed a bunch of does with a buck that was standing hunched over a little. My stomach instantly turned over as I thought I'd hit him too far back. I decided to just sit back and watch to see if the buck stayed there, and then come back in the morning to look for him. However, as I got him centered in my spotting scope, I realized that it wasn't Kong. This buck must have just been rutted-up, so I went back to the food plot and continued to look. After about 40 minutes, I saw a little blood on the outer rows of the food plot. I worked my way east, which led me to one of my



cut cornfields, and as I came over a little rise I spotted Kong dead in the field.

I quickly discovered why I wasn't finding much blood sign. My arrow had gone through both lungs but hit the opposite shoulder blade, preventing a complete pass-through.

At that point, I don't know if I was more excited or relieved. The buck that had absolutely consumed me for two years was lying dead at my feet. It wasn't until I got Kong back home to show my family that I realized just how big he truly was.

I really had no clue the buck would be breaking any state records, and at that time I couldn't have told you what our state-record buck even scored. I initially scored Kong by myself using an app on my phone, and came up with 203 inches! That didn't seem possible to me, until I took him to Lone Wolf Taxidermy. Lance Burns, the taxidermist, was excited about the buck, and I wasn't even home yet when my phone rang. Lance had measured the buck and checked on the current South Dakota state record, which was 182 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", and my buck had beaten it.

On January 20, after the required 60-day drying period, long-time Pope and Young Club measurers Stan Rauch and Craig Oberle officially scored Kong. His gross score was 209 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", and his net score was 194 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Not only did my buck break the state record for a typical whitetail bowkill, but it also broke the Boone and Crockett state record of 193 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", which had stood since 1948. Kong's rack features standout G-2s, the longest of which is 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ " inches.

To sum it all up, this has been a very humbling experience I will never forget. Bowhunting has always been a passion of mine, and to take a huge buck like this with my bow is beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I don't know if I will ever top this deer, but I sure will have fun trying.

I want to give a special thanks to my wife, Liza, and daughters, Maycee and Sadie, for being patient with me while I spent a total of nearly 180 hours in pursuit of Kong. <<<

*The author lives in Eureka, South Dakota, where he runs a cattle and farming operation.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** On this hunt I used a Mathews Chill R bow, Carbon Express Maxima Red arrows, Slick Trick broadheads, Sitka Gear clothing, and Swarovski optics.

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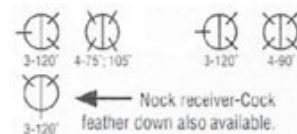
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# PREDICTING THE *Unpredictable*

*If you're not watching the position of the moon, you might be missing a potential advantage.*

BY ADAM HAYS III

**W**HEN IT COMES TO HUNTING mature whitetails, being able to predict their movements is crucial. But how do you predict, with any sort of consistency, what an animal is going to do during the most unpredictable time of the year — the breeding season? When does come into estrus, a giant whitetail's pattern will be random at best, making November a challenging time to predict anything. November may be the best time of the year to catch a big buck moving during daylight hours, but is there a way to know when he's going to move, and where?

I struggled with the rut for a long time, trying to score on big deer during a phase of the season when everybody else was getting it done. I'd taken my share of nice deer, but it was always during the early season. My strategies for targeting specific animals on predictable feeding patterns has helped me tag a handful of big bucks. But one thing that has paid off tremendously is using the moon to time my hunts. I wait for a very specific moon time before diving into my best spots.

It wasn't until I started adapting these strategies to my rut hunts that I started putting some big bone on the ground in November. Over the years, I have read everything I could get my hands on pertaining to the rut and a whitetail's behavior. All the different terminology can get confusing: pre-rut, lockdown, seeking, chasing, post-rut, secondary rut...the list goes on and on. The timing of these phases depends on your location, and then there's the weather factor. Do warm tem-

peratures suppress breeding, or push it back? What about cooler than normal temps, or extremely windy or rainy conditions? With all these variables, is it even possible to predict deer movement in November? Where do you begin, and how do you know the best days or times to hunt? Or is it simply a matter of spending more time in your favorite treestand?

I've always believed in hunting *smart* during the early and late seasons, and hunting *hard* during the rut. The more time you are out there in November, the better your chances, right? This is true. But when I'm hunting, I want everything in my favor, including being in the right place at the right time.

Forget for a minute everything you've learned about the rut, and think basics. To kill a big buck, he must be moving during daylight, and you need to be there at that time. The key to consistently killing mature bucks revolves around movement — whether he's doing it by himself, or chasing a doe. When I quit worrying about the phase of the rut and the other variables and began concentrating on key movement times and locations according to the position of the moon, things changed drastically for me.

It's fascinating to hear other hunters' views on the moon and what impact it has, if any, on their hunting strategies. They either believe in it, or they don't. My question is, since it has been proven that the moon influences and even triggers the rut, why would anyone think that the moon has no impact on deer movement?





I killed my best Illinois buck to date with the moon overhead just after daylight.

SPREAD: AUTHOR'S PHOTO; BUCK: JOHN FORD



## PREDICTING THE UPREDICTABLE

For two decades I have hunted according to the moon. Not the *phase* of the moon, but rather I've focused on the *position* of the moon in relation to the Earth. I've witnessed firsthand a significant increase in daylight movement by mature animals during the overhead and underfoot moon times. It doesn't matter if it's summer, early season, or the rut — big deer move on these so-called "red moon" times. I shot my ninth Boone and Crockett buck with a bow last year during this specific time, providing further proof that hunting by moon position has validity. These red moon times happen at different times every day, and the key is knowing where you need to be hunting when they do occur. The following is my strategy for hunting the rut based on when the overhead and underfoot moon times occur, and the locations I'm hunting.

I've had my best luck on big deer during evening hunts in October, not during the rut. During the early season, it's next to impossible to beat a big buck to his bedding area before dawn. But give me a late-morning moon time (defined as straight overhead or straight underfoot) in November, and it's a different story. If I have any hopes of catching a big buck coming back to bed late, it'll be during a late-morning moon time when I will dive into a buck's bedding area, or hunt the travel routes to these spots. I've also had success hunting field edges in the morning during this moon position — something I would never try in October.

My best Illinois bowkill to date came from such a setup. I had a trail camera along a picked cornfield that ran along the top of a bluff where the woods bordering the field were very narrow at the top. The deer on this farm, especially the bigger bucks,

would travel this edge late in the morning, scent-checking for hot does leaving the field, before bedding just off the field edge. I had a long walk uphill in the dark to get to my stand, but I was able to access it without alerting any deer in the cornfield. The big 10-point had passed by my trail camera just before daylight the day before. A day later, with the moon overhead just after daylight, the buck made the mistake of coming by again just 10 yards in front of my Lone Wolf stand — end of story.

I have caught a couple of other really big bucks with their guard down in the morning because I was keying on that late-morning moon time. I like setting up on thin strips of timber or drainages, or any type of edge or cover leading to a bedding area, for a morning ambush site. When a big buck is late coming back to bed, he will use these areas to conceal his movements.

I shot a really heavy eight-point with split G-2s in Kansas in this exact scenario. I set up next to a large tract of CRP that I knew at least one mature buck would be bedding in. There was a small strip of trees along a narrow drainage that led right to the bedding area, and I caught the buck about an hour after daylight on an overhead moon. He will never be late to bed again.

Just last year I shot my best Kansas buck — a tall eight-point that grossed in the mid-180s — on an overhead moon that peaked around 10 a.m. The early morning hunt was slow, but by 9:30 deer were moving everywhere. I caught the giant following a doe through a thin strip of trees within the hour of the red moon. If I had to pick the best moon times during November, it would have to be the days when the overhead or underfoot moon peaks within three hours of sunrise.

My second choice for November would be a midday moon time. Although this particular time normally calls for a longer sit in the stand, and sometimes even an all-day sit, the 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. period seems to be great for deer movement when

**Despite warm temperatures and everything being locked down, I managed to kill this big Kansas 10-pointer late in the morning, within 10 minutes of the overhead moon.**





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## PREDICTING THE UPREDICTABLE

the moon is peaking at midday. Keep in mind, a movement period in the middle of the day typically means the activity will be in thick cover.

I'll never forget my hunt for a big 10-point in Kansas a few years ago. It was mid-November and everything was locked down. The temperatures were warm, and the deer weren't moving. I'd been concentrating on the late-morning moon times in my usual spots, but the week came and went with no sightings of the big deer.

At about 10:30 a.m. on the seventh day, and after seeing nothing all morning, I went to check some cameras before heading out to a different farm for the evening. The first camera was one I had placed over a breeding scrape not 100 yards off the road, and right in the middle of a big thicket. An old logging road allowed me to get in and out with little disturbance. I was shocked to see a photo of the big 10, and I had just missed him. He had come through just after 10 a.m., within minutes of the overhead moon!

I gathered my stuff and dove into a

nearby stand for the rest of the day. Although he didn't show, the plan was to return the next morning, ready for an all-day sit. The moon peaked roughly an hour later the following day, and just before 11 a.m., I put the buck down within 10 minutes of the overhead moon.

It doesn't always happen deep in the woods during midday. Case in point is a wide eight-point I chased in Illinois a few years back. On the fifth day of my hunt, with the moon peaking around noon, I received a call from my farmer friend letting me know the big eight-point had a doe pinned down in the middle of a huge cornfield. After climbing down and driving to the area, I located the pair smack in the middle of nothing — 300 yards from the nearest tree! All I could do was sit and wait on the edge of the timber. Fortunately, they didn't stay there long, and the doe lured the buck back to the timber. I put an arrow through him at 20 yards as he focused his attention on his new girlfriend. This all came together within the hour of the red moon!

Evening hunts can also be very productive during the rut. Normally, I stick to my early season tactics for evening hunts, opting for stand locations on or

near field edges and food sources. I just don't like to penetrate cover for an evening hunt for fear of alerting any deer to my presence. If a mature buck is going to show himself during daylight, especially in a wide-open food source, I find the best chance is when the moon peaks near primetime, right before sunset.

One thing about the moon and its influences on deer movement is that it affects all deer. If the moon is right for an evening hunt, the does will be in the fields feeding early, and you can bet the mature bucks won't be far behind. All of my biggest bucks taken in October were shot near field edges in the evenings, with a red moon peaking within a couple hours of dark. I use the same strategy in November.

On one hunt in the Edmonton Bow Zone, I shot a beautiful 10-point as he entered a field full of oats and feeding does. It was the middle of the rut, and I had planned my trip to coincide with an overhead moon in the evenings. I didn't concern myself with the stage of the rut. I knew the weather could be extreme, so I concentrated my efforts on the absolute best times. The Alberta weather did not disappoint, with brutally cold temps ranging from -20 to -30 degrees.



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Knowing the position of the moon and the cold temps would have the does feeding early, I set up on the edge of a field and used a snort-wheeze to draw this big Ohio buck into bow range.



AUTHOR'S PHOTO

That was one hunt when I was more than happy to fill my tag on the first night!

It can get cold in my home state of Ohio, too, especially towards the end of the rut. One of my best bucks came on a very chilly evening, on the edge of a picked cornfield with the rut winding

down. I knew the cold temps would have the deer feeding heavily, and with a red moon peaking right before dusk, I knew where I needed to be.

The field started loading up early, but it was all bucks! I think there were seven different bucks in the field when the gi-

ant 180-class whitetail showed up. He marched around the field like he owned the place, daring any buck to challenge him. As he worked his way to my side of the field, I let out a snort-wheeze. That was all it took, and I had another giant on the ground within the hour of the red moon!

If you're not a believer in the moon, I hope my experiences will change your mind, or at least pique your interest enough to look into the possibilities. I can honestly say that by paying close attention to the position of the moon in the sky, and having a good enough understanding of deer movement that I knew where to be at those times, has put more big deer on the ground for me than any other tactic I can think of. If you are curious about this strategy and still have questions, you can find all the answers at [moonguide.com](http://moonguide.com). This website explains the moon times I have discussed in detail, and even offers a dial that will give you the best days and times for the entire season, as well as *where* you should be hunting at those times.

Where will you be this fall when that moon is right? I know where I will be! ««

*The author has taken three bucks over 200 inches. He's also the producer of Team200 on the Sportsman Channel (200inch.com).*



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Relying on the rut to bring public-land bucks to you can be frustrating, until it's not.

RANDOM

**P**redictably, our conversation centered on bowhunting deer as we crossed into South Dakota, and then eventually into Nebraska. My hunting partner, Ryan Hawkins, and I were on a rut-hunting mission to north-central Nebraska. Two pieces of public land, totaling about 1,500 acres, were our final destination.

We had hunted deer on these properties once in 2012, and we'd had a pretty good hunt. Some insight gained from that first hunt, plus a few spring turkey hunts, helped us formulate a plan for our return trip. On each end of the main property, pinch-points at the top of a bluff filtered deer movement. We had witnessed it before, and knew that if we put in enough time, we'd probably be rewarded. We also knew that there would be other hunters on the property, but that they'd likely stay low on the creekbottom.

Arriving with just enough daylight left to see, we strapped our stands and sticks to our packs and sweated our way up the bluff. I left Ryan at the base of a pine tree to sort out his gear, while I hiked to the far end to do the same. The tree I had chosen to hang my stand in had been conveniently trimmed by another hunter in the past. In fact, nearly every tree I'd sat in on the property had been trimmed in the past by someone else — testament to the hunting pressure there.

As I made my way back to Ryan's tree to head back to camp

and set up our tents, I spotted a young buck trotting through a picked cornfield to our east. His nose-to-the-ground, oblivious nature got my heart racing, but I also knew that the rut was a mistress that could potentially be both awesome and frustrating.

As a lifelong Minnesota resident, I've learned to hunt outside of the rut. Our firearms season opens the first week of November, which means that nearly all of my home-state bowhunting occurs outside of the rut, and I've grown comfortable with that. This is not to say that I don't love the rut and what it can do, but I don't rely on it as much as a lot of other bowhunters do. I'm also somewhat skeptical of the rut, knowing that while things can be absolutely crazy during the first couple weeks of November, they also can be very disappointing.

Late into the first night, with a dying fire between us, Ryan and I discussed the pos-



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

By Tony J. Peterson, Equipment Editor

Our public-land hunting strategy is always to try to work harder than the competition. This is why we hunt areas where we either have to climb or cross rivers. In Nebraska last fall, this strategy didn't completely get us away from the competition, but it was good enough to allow us to double-up on two great bucks. Taking care of both bucks back at camp was made easier with the help of our Viking Solutions Buck UP.





## RANDOM CHAOS

sibilities of having an all-out chasing fest occur around our stands in the morning. It was November 8, so that was definitely not out of the question.

### Here Comes The Cavalry

The ceiling of my tent was covered in glistening frost when I awoke to the sound of my phone's alarm. After lighting a lantern, I started to heat water on my camp stove while listening for the stirring of my hunting partner. We were fully dressed and sipping coffee by lantern light when the first truck pulled in. Then a second set of headlights cut the darkness. Then a third.

We filled our Thermoses up with coffee and were putting on our packs when we spotted a bobbing headlamp start up the hill. Ryan and I exchanged glances, grabbed our bows, and headed uphill as well. Our plan was to catch up to the hunter and figure out where he was headed, so we wouldn't be on top of one another.

At the lip of the bluff we caught up to the hunter, a very nice fellow from Michigan whose father was hunting the other property we planned to sit. He mentioned that his stand was about three-quarters of the way down the property, which would take him well away from Ryan's stand, but would probably put him close to mine. The Michigan hunter and I walked together down the fenceline after dropping Ryan off.

As we neared my stand, he said he needed to drop down the hill, so I wished him good luck. It was still early enough that not a hint of light breached the eastern horizon when I climbed into my stand and settled in. The moon lit the prairie grass around my island of pines, and immediately I spotted a shape ghosting through the darkness. My hands instinctively went to my chest to grab my binoculars, but instead they found nothing but jacket. In our haste to leave camp, I had left my binoculars on the picnic table. *At least I have my coffee*, I thought, as I watched the shape of a cruising buck slip into the creekbottom toward our newfound Michigan friend.

When the slimmest of orange slivers appeared in the sky



**When we returned to camp to retrieve our game cart, we were visited by a Conservation Officer who checked our licenses and talked hunting with us for a few minutes.**

behind me, I screwed the cap to my Thermos on tight and nocked an arrow. A slight breeze bent the grass below me as it whisked past my tree and off over the ridge.

### Mistaken Identity

Twenty minutes into shooting light, a lone doe fed her way through the field behind me. She looked almost black in the chopped cornfield, which glowed golden in the early morning light. I was watching her when a horse whinnied in the direction I expected the deer to come from. It sounded close — too close. I wondered if perhaps someone wasn't out for a morning ride, which would not bode well for my chances of arrowing a buck. After hearing the horse, I then heard rustling in the grass and convinced myself that indeed someone was going to ride right past my stand.

Then I heard a grunt punctuate the air. And then another.

Without thinking about it, which was a mistake, I stood straight up and looked to my left. Two racks poked above the grass, and a doe stood staring in my direction. She snorted, stomped her hoof, and then snorted again. Immediately I re-

**The promise of rutting action is something that never gets old, especially when the sun rises on a crisp November morning like this one.**



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## RANDOM CHAOS

alized that I had likely blown it, and to make matters much worse, a closer look at both bucks told me that I'd have been very happy with either one of them.

As I stood there hoping the doe would suddenly forget what she had seen, the two bucks started grunting and circling her. She started walking away from me, then turned 180 degrees to trot in my direction. I dialed-in my sight and got ready as she slipped through.

The first buck on her heels was a

solid 140-class deer, and I was already at full draw when he hit the opening. For my second encore, I punched the trigger and missed the buck by at least two feet. I hadn't even aimed at him, let alone thought about it. I just drew and shot randomly in the direction of the buck. He disappeared down the hill behind the doe.

At that point, what little composure I may have had left also seemed to travel downhill and out of my life with the deer. The second buck — a solid 120-inch deer — started his way toward the others, and I readied myself for another shot. I drew on the buck, but as hard as



## CHEAP INSURANCE

Some of the best lessons you learn on a hunt come via a hardship. During a spring turkey hunt to the same property we would eventually double-up on with rutting bucks, Ryan and I decided to carry blinds, decoys, chairs and gear as far into the public land as we could. A small clearing, visible on aerial photos, was our destination.

Once we reached the clearing, Ryan looked at his bow and realized that his string had derailed. With nothing to do but hunt for a while before going all the way back to camp, he sat there with an expensive paperweight of a bow, while I called-in and arrowed a jake not 20 minutes into our setup.

It was a reminder that not only should you always have a portable bow press like a Bowmaster from Prototech Industries (847-223-9808; prototechind.com) with you, you should also know how to use it. I had never seen a bow come derailed from walking through the brush before, but now I know it can happen. And if it does, and you have no way to fix it, you're in trouble. A simple press like the Bowmaster can literally save your hunt. Carry one, always, and learn how to use it.

I tried, couldn't get him to stop. He ran out of my life as well.

My heart sank with the realization that the rut hunt I wanted had transpired in a matter of seconds, and I had blown it. I was plummeting into the depths of a serious pity party when I heard another deer in the grass. This one was heading right at me, presumably to swing wide and cut off the other deer. One glimpse of the buck told me I needed to act fast.

I dialed my sight down to 20 yards and bleated as loud as I could while drawing. At only 12 yards, he put on the brakes and stared forward. He was in a trance, yet it was clear he was seconds away from renewing his pursuit.

My pin floated from his hip to about five inches behind his shoulder and the arrow was gone. The buck bolted at the shot, and at 70 yards he dropped from sight. The entire encounter with all of the deer had lasted maybe a minute and a half, and as I tried to hang my bow up, I realized I couldn't. My motor skills had diminished to the point where I just had to clutch my bow with one hand and the

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## RANDOM CHAOS

tree trunk with the other. When I finally sat down, I realized that the pine needles all around me were still dancing from my involuntary shaking.

I knew I had hit the buck, and thought it was a good shot, but that was it. Everything else was a mystery I tried to piece together. Then I saw my arrow lying on the ground, and a crimson swath leading through the yellow grass below me.

The realization that I had shot a giant public-land buck didn't do anything to cease my trembling, and that's when I started second-guessing myself. As the encounter replayed over and over in my mind, a young buck caught my eye. When he reached the spot where I last saw my buck, the youngster stopped suddenly, and then slowly backedpedaled. He cut a wide arc before dropping down to the riverbottom. I knew he had seen my buck lying there, so I texted Ryan. His response was that he, too, had shot a buck.

### Double Recovery

While picking up our game cart from camp, a Conservation Officer pulled up.



My hunting partner, Ryan Hawkins, is pictured here with his Nebraska public-land white-tail. The young eight-pointer crossed a fence and walked through the pinch-point Ryan was positioned on.

He checked our licenses and then chatted with us for a few minutes before driving on.

We found my buck right where I

thought he would be, and we quickly got him field-dressed and hung up in camp. While working on my deer, the Michigan hunter walked down the hill.

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A lone, hot doe brought three different bucks with her to my stand. After whiffing completely on the first buck and not being able to get the second one to stop, I was lucky enough to get this buck to stop at 12 yards for a shot. He is my largest buck ever at 156 inches.

It was an amazing hunt no doubt, and I'm only a little ashamed to admit that while I've had some great rut hunts in the past, this was something altogether different. It was unreal, and a good reminder that just because I do something a certain way doesn't necessarily make it the best, or only, way. To punctuate that point, I needed to look no further than the 156-inch 10-pointer hanging between our tents. Or the second buck, a smaller eight-pointer stashed in the shade, waiting his turn on the gambrel. Or the third buck making his way down the hill in a game cart, led by a father-son team who were smiling from ear to ear at their success. <<<

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE:

On this hunt, I used an Elite Synergy bow, Easton Injexion arrows, Muzzy broadheads, QAD rest, HHA sight, ScentLok clothing, Cabela's camping gear, Ameristep game cart, and Viking Solutions butchering gear.

He told us that he had also shot a buck — a beautiful eight-pointer with a 17-inch spread.

Ryan's buck would prove to be a tough recovery. His shot, low and too far

back, forced us to let the buck lay for several hours before taking up the trail. The deer led us up and down the hills, before expiring at the base of the bluff not far from our campsite.

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# QUEST FOR 200 INCHES

By Matt **Palmquist**  
Photos By Steve **Gerlach**

WHEN YOU DEVELOP AN EMOTIONAL TIE TO A BUCK LIKE THIS, EVENTUALLY KILLING HIM CAN BE A BITTERSWEET AFFAIR.

**MY GOOD FRIEND**, Steve Gerlach, is no stranger to success in the whitetail woods. Over the last 10 years, he has consistently killed mature Kansas giants that would qualify as once-in-a-lifetime bucks for most hunters. Living in Kansas and hunting quality private land ultimately spoils those of us lucky enough to live and hunt here. Like most whitetail hunters, Steve has dreamed of eclipsing the magical 200-inch mark that Kansas and other Midwest states have become famous for in the white-tail world. However, the reality is those deer are few and far between. After killing multiple bucks that grossed over 160 inches, Steve set a lofty goal of breaking 180. He came close a time or two, but fell an inch or two short. As his buddy, I had a tough time feeling sorry for him!

Steve has used trail cameras to his advantage to locate this caliber of whitetail. Once he locates a buck he wants to kill, he is smart about hunting that buck. He is very patient, and he won't intrude on the buck's home until the time is right. When his target buck finally shows up in daylight hours, Steve will wait until the conditions are nearly perfect before moving in to strike. This has yielded great results for Steve.

During the 2013 season, Steve hadn't located a buck he was excited about and ended up making several trips west to hunt mule deer with me. On his second trip, Steve arrowed a heavy, mature mule deer, which ended his season in Kansas. While he was hunting with me, Steve offered to let me hunt some of his whitetail haunts back home. I jokingly said that if he had a net Boone and Crockett buck on camera when he got home, I would take him up on his offer.

I got a call from Steve a few days later, and he said he might actually have the kind of deer we had sarcastically discussed. He sent me a couple of pictures of a beautiful 6x6 typical that very well could net over the 170-inch B&C minimum. I couldn't believe it, and told Steve to keep me posted. But knowing Steve had several children and a wife who had started hunting, I didn't intend to hunt the deer.

Even though the 6x6 hadn't showed up in daylight yet, Steve decided that since the conditions were perfect, he would take his 11-year-old daughter, Cassidy, to hunt a blind where the buck was living. Like it was meant to be, the huge typical came within range early in the sit and Cassidy made a great shot with her crossbow, killing the kind of buck every hunter dreams about!

High on his daughter's success and tagged-out himself, Steve quit checking his cameras regularly, but left them in the woods to monitor late-season movement. As shed season approached, Steve checked his cameras and discovered an exceptional buck had shown up mid-December in the same area where Cassidy had killed her deer. This buck had great mass and quite a few extras, and he showed potential for turning into something special. The hunt was on, and Steve was determined to find the shed antlers from this buck.

On an outing with his youngest daughter, Laney, Steve spotted a large antler in a crop field, but kept quiet and let Laney spot the antler herself. Of course, she laid claim to the shed and the buck like any enthusiastic seven-year-old would. The entire Gerlach Family grid-searched the rest of the area multiple times that spring in hopes of finding the matching shed, but they never located it.



Steve's daughter, Cassidy, was fortunate to make a great shot on this beautiful Kansas 6x6.





In 2014, my buddy, Steve Gerlach, finally achieved his dream of killing a 200-inch buck. Topping this deer will be hard to do.



## QUEST FOR 200 INCHES

Steve studied the shed antler and trail camera pictures and soon realized that he had this buck's antlers from the previous year. He didn't know the buck when they picked up the set, and he didn't have any pictures of him either. Cassidy was with him that day as well, and she picked up the matched set of antlers that were in the 140-class. Judging from his antlers that year, Steve guessed the buck was old and on the downhill slide because the bases were large compared to the rest of the antlers. Thankfully, he was mistaken, and the buck had put on an additional 30 inches of antler!

Steve spent the offseason thinking about this buck and what he might become, hoping for another explosion of growth. In 2013, he didn't get any pictures of the deer until late in the season. He expected the same results in 2014, but he ran his cameras religiously anyways. Like he had predicted, the buck never showed his face, and it was evident that the buck was calling another area home during the summer and early fall.

The season opener came and went with no sign of the buck. As the rut neared, I talked to Steve on a regular basis and he had not seen any sign of the giant he dreamed about. I will give Steve credit for keeping the faith that the buck would show up. He had other great bucks showing up on camera, but not the buck he wanted. Finally, on November 3, he got a picture of the bruiser, confirming his hopes and dreams...the buck had morphed into a bona fide giant! The photo was captured in the middle of the night, and there was only one image.

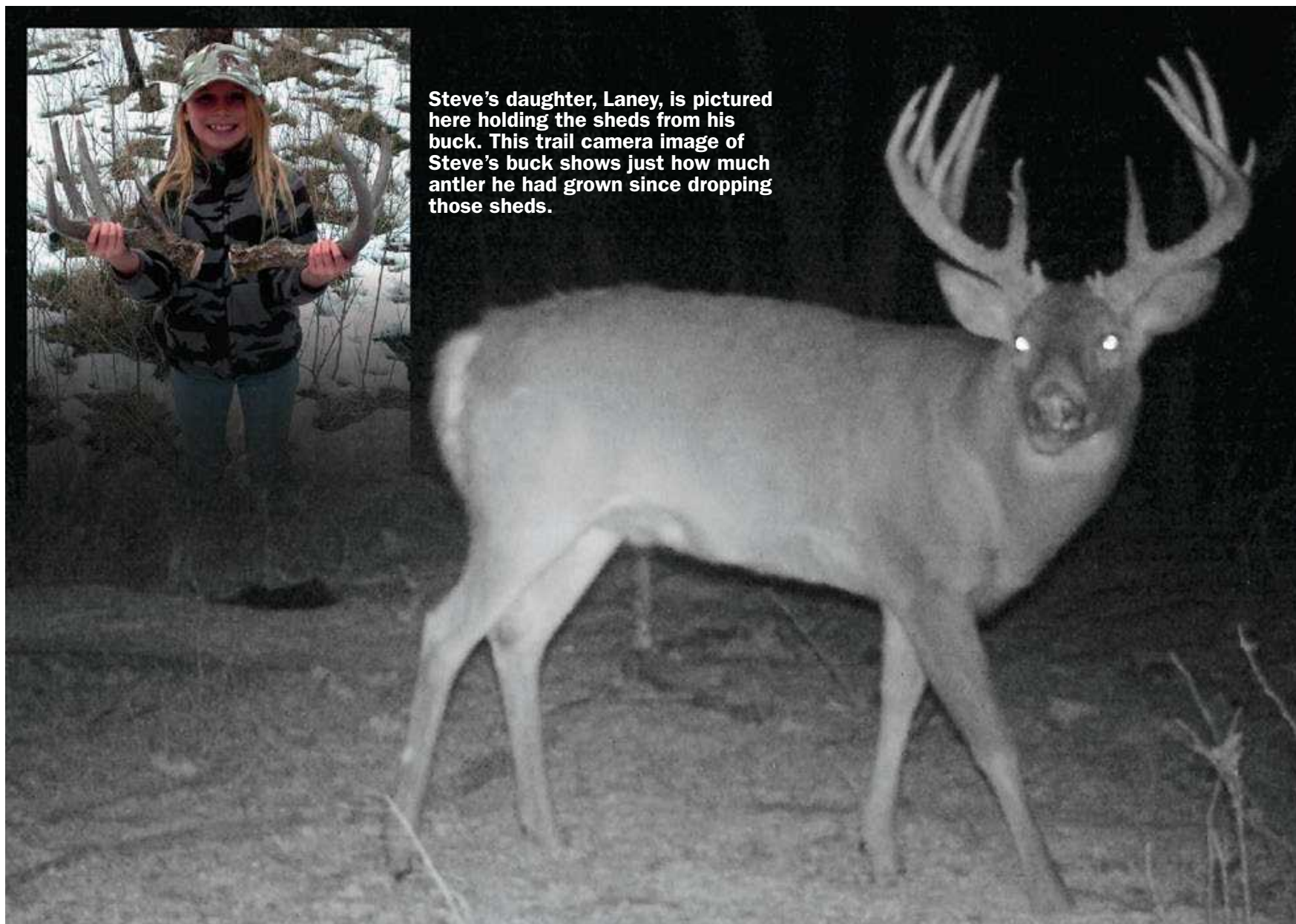
Since he didn't want to pressure the area, Steve opted to expand his search for the deer, hoping the rut would cause him

to let down his guard and show up in daylight. Steve called me one morning a few days after he got the picture, and like usual, my first question was, "Did you get him?" He said no, but he was watching him tend a doe on the neighbor's property, close to a main road. The buck had finally slipped up, but he was in an area Steve couldn't hunt. Steve was able to watch the buck off and on throughout the morning, which was an awesome experience, but torture for an obsessed bowhunter.

As November wore on, it became evident that hunters on the surrounding properties were fully aware of the buck's existence, and they were all in full pursuit. To say Steve was a nervous wreck would be an understatement.

Several days after Steve witnessed the daytime display, the buck finally became a regular back in the area where he had dropped his antlers the winter before. Unfortunately, all of his documented movement was in the middle of the night. Steve stayed the course and didn't pressure the area, hoping all of the surrounding hunting pressure would just push the buck into his core area for good. He was able to hunt a few times on the fringe in hopes of catching a glimpse of the buck in daylight hours, but without success.

As November came to a close, the buzz around the area had dwindled, and no one had killed the deer to Steve's knowledge. Rifle season started the Wednesday after Thanksgiving, but in Kansas it is legal to continue bowhunting during the firearms season. Finally, Steve got the evidence that he had patiently waited months for. The buck showed up with a doe in the middle of the day, near one of his stands on the first Saturday of rifle season. Although not perfect, the wind was going to be acceptable to slip in and hunt a ground blind on the fringe the following afternoon.



**Steve's daughter, Laney, is pictured here holding the sheds from his buck. This trail camera image of Steve's buck shows just how much antler he had grown since dropping those sheds.**





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Anticipation was at an all-time high as Steve got settled into the blind around noon. It was good that he crawled in early that day, because the buck appeared shortly after 2 p.m. Steve nearly got a shot, but the buck stayed to the left of the blind, and it would have been a difficult shot to pull off through a narrow window.

The buck disappeared out of sight, and Steve was upset that had he let the buck slip away and may have just missed his only opportunity. But there was a lot of daylight left, so he regained his composure and stayed focused, knowing the buck was close.

It didn't take long before the buck came back into view. This time, Steve wasted little time making the necessary adjustment for a clear shot to the buck's vitals. It would be a tight window to shoot through, but Steve was confident in his abilities. The buck of his dreams stood at 18 yards when Steve loosed his arrow, making a perfect shot!

I will never forget when I got a call that Sunday afternoon, and I finally got the answer to my question that I had expected all along. Steve said the buck was down within sight of him! Happy would be an understatement for the feelings I had for my buddy. He had strategized and made all the right moves, and it had paid off in a big way.

Steve didn't sound as excited as I had expected he would, but I don't think it had really sunk in yet. We discussed his reaction at a later date, and he mentioned that while he was elated, he was also sad. He had spent so much time thinking about this deer, and now the quest for him was over. Having experienced this feeling myself, I knew exactly where he was coming from, and having respect for the animals we pursue is one of the reasons Steve and I are great friends.

Word spread throughout the area about Steve killing the giant buck. As luck would have it, some of Steve's other friends were talking to a local farmer in the area about the deer, and they showed him a picture. Not only did the farmer recognize the buck from the picture, he had the shed antler from the year before that the Gerlach Family had spent many hours searching for!

Steve's friends were able to acquire the shed and present it to Steve, putting an exclamation point on the already perfect ending to his quest. The buck unofficially gross-scored over that magical 200-inch



This angle shows a lot of the extras Steve's buck sported that make his deer so special.

mark, adding to Steve's impressive resume as a successful whitetail hunter. That buck is going to be a tough one to top, but I would put money on Steve making it happen again sooner than later. <<<

*The author is a regular Contributor from Grainfield, Kansas.*

**AUTHOR'S NOTES:** Steve, his wife, Melissa, and their daughters, Makayla, Lindsey, Cassidy and Laney, spend many days in the field together, scouting and hunting for whitetails. All but Laney have successfully put their tag on some exceptional deer, and I expect nothing less when Laney is old enough to join in the fun. Hunting whitetails is truly a family affair for the Gerlach's.

The first set of sheds that Steve found off his buck taped close to 145 inches. It was evident in trail camera pictures that the buck had grown significantly the next year. After getting the other shed antler from the farmer, the buck was scored and he had put on 36 inches and came in at 181 inches. Steve thinks the buck was five years old when he finally caught up to him. The deer had put on another 25 inches that year, and he gross-scored a whopping 206 inches! If the genetics are there, whitetails can do some amazing things.

Steve's list of equipment used to kill this magnificent buck included a Prime bow, Gold Tip arrows, Rage broadheads, HHA sight, Tru-Fire release, Bushnell optics, Lethal scent-control products, and Predator Camo clothing.





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# THE THANKSGIVING

**THE OLD, WIDE BUCK** taunted me everywhere I hunted across the bluffs and valleys of the broad prairie. Taunting me by day and haunting my nights, he drove me nuts as my best strategies continued to fall short. He had no interest in calls, and ambushes always led to his teasing me just outside recurve range. After the first week, I decided it was him or nothing. The challenge he presented was one that no experienced muley hunter can resist.

Historians tell us that venison for the first “Thanksgiving” in 1621 was delivered by Chief Massasoit of the Wampanong tribe. His men were apparently more skilled with their hickory longbows and snares than the Pilgrims were with their

smoothbore matchlocks. The Pilgrims also likely had no experience hunting the King’s Deer before leaving England. So, upon learning of this upcoming harvest celebration, Massasoit sent his best hunters to harvest some deer for the feast, and blessed the Pilgrims with this great bounty. Before the feast, a Calvinist prayer was offered in thanks for the generous blessing.

In my case, a very special Thanksgiving blessing of venison for my family was delivered by an Osage recurve bow, a bounty of luck, and a great buck that, until that day, seemed destined to live another season.

Hunting mule deer on the Great Plains with a bow of any



sort can be a frustrating experience — among the most challenging in our sport. Shrinking the effective range with a traditional bow adds another element of difficulty. Then throw in the unpredictability of the rut, when mule deer follow no patterns, with dozens of eyes, ears and noses to spoil the stalk, and it becomes a trifecta of frustrations. Attempting to hunt one specific buck that roams a dozen square miles appears to be an exercise in futility. Yet, there I was on Thanksgiving morn-

ing, engaged in the hunt while hiding in a shallow ditch on a holiday when I could be home, cozy warm and watching football, surrounded by tempting smells from the kitchen. Instead, I was watching the old, wide buck nosing a doe at 100 yards, hoping he wandered in my direction, because I'd crawled as far as I could.

I'd pursued this wide buck and his herd since the beginning of November, across parts of two different counties. Whenever

BY LOU PHILLIPPE

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



WINNING BLESSING





## THE THANKSGIVING BLESSING

I zigged, he would zag. I hiked the broad prairie for miles to wait where I expected the deer to bed, only to come up empty. The buck showed little interest in decoying or rattling, and he liked to wander.

I'd set up an ambush where he and his does had staged for three straight mornings, and then I watched through binoculars as the deer crested a hilltop a mile away, headed in the opposite direction. I would lose him for several

days before spotting him bedded with a half-dozen does 30 yards from the log pile where I'd attempted the previous ambush. I had him once at 50 yards — too far for my wooden stick. Along the way, I passed up a number of very nice bucks, because I wanted just one crack at this guy.

This particular riverbottom, like most on the plains, is dry for most of the year. Water flows underground through the aquifer, nourishing the roots of a narrow band of trees, but it rarely surfaces unless a major storm creates a flash

flood. That spring, a rush of high water blasted down the valley and piled logs and debris into fantastic natural blinds, some like forts as high as my head. With a little adjustment, these provided outstanding ambush points. And by using the scoured-out channel of the creek, I could move up and downstream below the level of the surrounding prairie.

Each season brings different deer movements, depending upon where the favored food sources are that year. Of all the deer I've killed out there, none have been from the same spot. This season, there was one particular clearing where I often saw the wide buck and his does staging in the mornings before settling into a bedding area in the open trees, where they could see hundreds of yards in every direction. A bedding-area stalk was impossible. I watched this pattern from a different blind several hundred yards away. One morning, when no deer passed by to bed in that flat, I investigated and found lots of pawed-up craters in the sand. The deer were rooting for large mushrooms just below the surface. This was a morning delicacy after feeding in stubble fields far out on the prairie, and I'd seen it before in other places. I've killed bucks that followed does into similar mushroom patches.

On the edge of the creek channel was a beautiful log blind, and I learned I could crawl out of there and sneak down the channel to escape without disturbing any deer that may get past me and bed out in the flat. There were no distinct trails, really, but plains muleys seldom follow trails anyway. I would have to wait patiently, stay frozen with no movement as they fed around me, hope the wind didn't shift, wait for the wide buck to follow does in there and present a shot in range, and then be able to draw and execute it without a doe spotting the movement. Easy, right?

Except the big buck and his does had moved their operation about a half-mile to a different set of gullies, where I'd been attempting futile ambushes for several evenings. I kept my wife apprised of my progress, or lack thereof, and she encouraged me to keep after it. She's lived through too many marathon hunting seasons with me.

The night before Thanksgiving, I called my wife and told her I was coming home for the holiday, and she scolded me for even thinking that. It was just the two of us at home, and she knew my heart would be following that buck even if I were there with her. She reminded me

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## THE THANKSGIVING BLESSING

I only had a few days left, and she wanted fresh venison in the freezer.

So on that holiday morning, four days before the November season ended, I had a hunch the deer may have moved downstream in the night due to some afternoon woodcutting that had taken place near where they'd been hanging out for the past week. I decided to try the log pile near the mushroom patch once again, even though I was close to figuring them out upstream. I've learned over the years that switching up and doing what your instincts tell you *not* to do often brings good results.

That morning, I watched a couple small groups of does drift by in the distance, accompanied by some good bucks, but I saw no sign of the wide one. A respectable buck came in right on top of me, presenting a strong temptation with so little time left. But I let him go after he posed for a few photographs. By 10 a.m., I was ready to call it a season and head home to spend Thanksgiving afternoon with my wife. I stood to glass around once more, and spotted deer moving through the sparse trees and tall

grass several hundred yards away. Then I saw him, trailing the rest of the herd with his interest locked on one special doe.

They fed around in a small clearing 200 yards away before bedding down, one by one, spreading out as mule deer often do. With a steady wind, I elected to narrow the angle and stalk as close as possible to the bedded deer. Sliding down into the dry creek swale, I inched forward, pushing my bow ahead of me. After about 100 yards, I encountered the unexpected — a smaller buck bedded on the edge of the creek bank. I feared he would jump up and spook the herd, so I crept as close as possible and stopped behind another pile of logs. The big buck was still 75 yards away, and I watched as his head nodded and bobbed before he finally dozed off. Perfect, except for the smaller buck in front of me, and the dozen does around him. I was stuck, with no recourse but to wait them out, pray the wind didn't shift, and hope they decided to wander closer to me at some point.

All spot-and-stalk bowhunters know this dilemma. Do we try to push a little closer and risk an explosion, or do we hide patiently and hope for the best? We make the choice, and if it works, we

celebrate. If not, we second-guess ourselves.

It had taken a half-hour to creep the short distance to this point from my blind. If not for the smaller buck in front of me, I could have likely stalked within bow range while the big buck slept.

During the next hour, I watched helplessly as he looked up several times, then laid his head back down to snooze. I was getting sleepy, too, and for a moment I thought about taking a nap myself. Then I remembered a couple times in the past when I'd succumbed to that temptation and woke up with the deer gone. I resisted the urge to doze off, and instead sucked on some high-caffeine energy gels to stay awake.

After another hour, a doe that had bedded beside the big buck hopped to her feet and looked directly at me. I thought I'd somehow been busted, but I couldn't figure out how. She then started nibbling browse in my direction, and the buck jumped up and followed dutifully along behind her.

They edged closer and closer, but as the doe began to angle away, I quickly assessed every shooting lane within the next few yards of their travels. I had a decision to make. He was right on the edge

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**My Thanksgiving muley was a wide, old buck that had taunted me for days on end as I pursued him across the vast prairie.**

of my instinctive range, but I'd been shooting well all season. In another minute there was a good chance they'd wander away, my opportunity squandered.

I waited until he locked up to watch her, with his vitals clear in front of a large

cottonwood and the rest of him hidden behind it. I figured I could squeeze an arrow past the tree and into his crease. If I pulled the shot slightly, it would hit the tree. When the doe turned her head, I slowly drew back, rose up onto my knees,

picked a spot, and released. The arrow arced across the opening and hit him, but I wasn't sure exactly where, since it flew from shadow to sunlight to shadow again. He spun and ran back toward the herd, slowed, stopped, circled and then collapsed. Just then, the noon siren went off in the small town a few miles away.

I waited a few minutes, but there was no need. Creeping toward the buck, I could see the heavy, wide beam arcing above the brown grass. A perfect heart shot. After field-dressing him, I hiked out to get my truck and called my wife to tell her the news.

"See!" she said. "Aren't you glad you took my advice and stayed out there? I just had a feeling. You've worked so hard for this buck. I'm really happy for you!"

I'd had that feeling too, but I had to convince myself to stay with it, even if it meant sacrificing the holiday with my wife. I'd not taken an elk that season, so this buck was the Thanksgiving gift that would feed us through the coming year. It was a special hunter's prayer I offered for the blessing as I knelt beside him on that crisp, sunny afternoon. «««

*The author and his wife live in Fort Collins, Colorado.*

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## EACH FALL, I SPEND HUNDREDS OF

hours afield with specialized photography gear hoping to capture behavioral images of mature, rutting whitetail bucks. Most of this time is spent following free-ranging deer on waterfowl and nature refuges, where they receive little pressure from hunting. This allows me to observe many deer actions, and even monitor individual deer, over relatively long timespans. I say relatively because, as you'll read, the gamut of dangers a whitetail buck encounters, sometimes on a daily basis, assures a pretty short lifespan.

Many of my bowhunting pals know I spend an inordinate amount of time afield with camera gear during the rut, so I get loads of questions concerning what exactly bucks are doing, and why a certain buck has disappeared right off their radar. In the following paragraphs, I'll describe just why that happens and what, if anything, can be done about it.

While they may lead a serene life the rest of the year, pitfalls encountered during the rut are what really doom most bucks, and can turn sighting frequency to zero. Chief among these are car collisions, followed by fatal battles with other bucks, and death brought on by overly taxing physical exertion.

How does knowing about these life-threatening factors help bowhunters? Because knowledge is power, and knowing what a maturing and/or mature buck is likely to do will keep them on the map and greatly aid in a successful hunt. Let's start off by breaking down individual pitfalls.

Car collisions are the greatest killer of big whitetail bucks, with the exception of maybe a freak epidemic of EHD or blue tongue disease. Since mature whitetail bucks, especially those 4½ years of age and older, expand their ranges outside small core areas during the rut, it's easy to see why they are vulnerable on the roads.



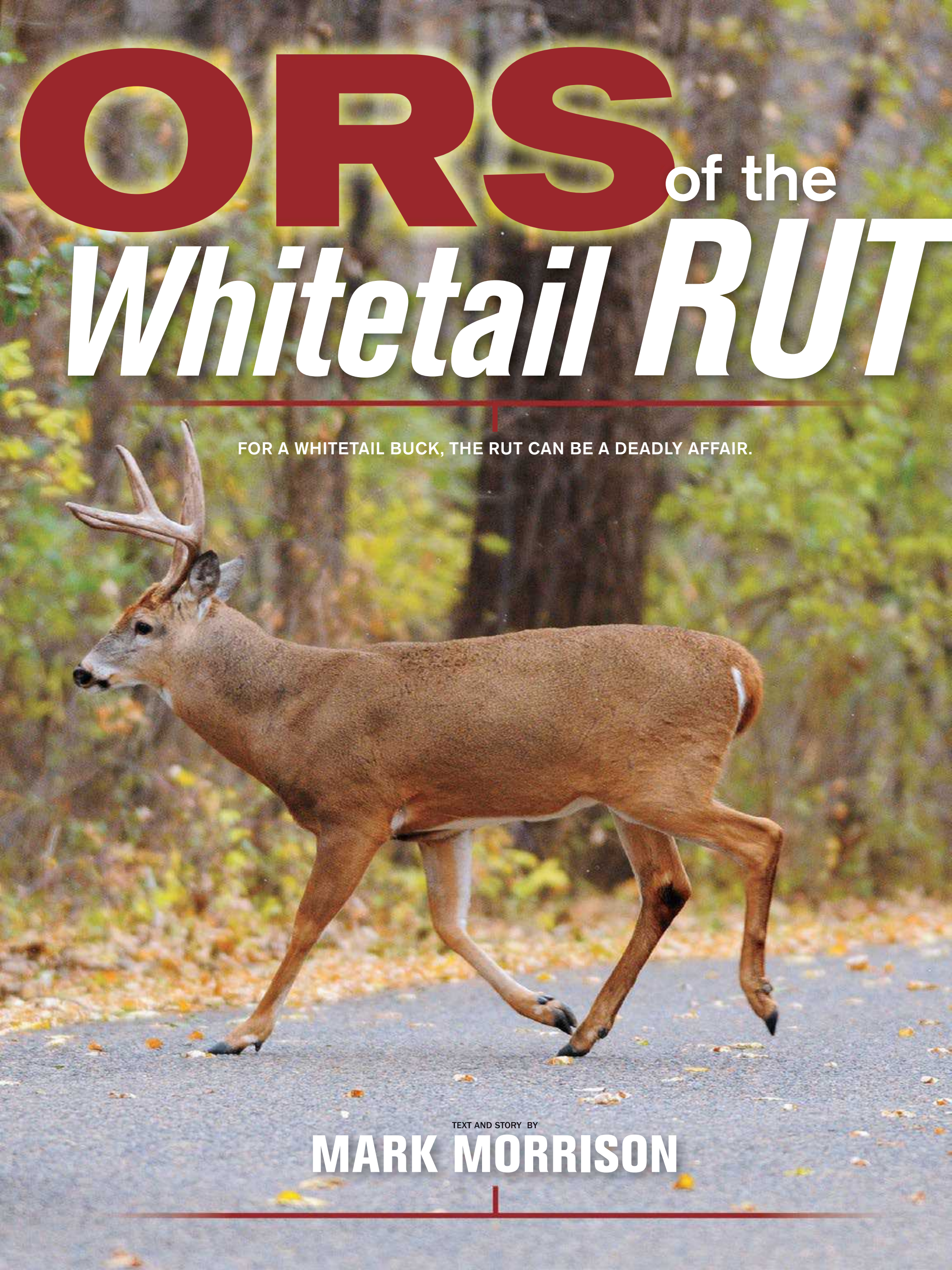
**One of the most common injuries from serious buck fights are eye wounds.**

# RIG



**Big whitetail bucks like this one will ignore nearly everything, even automobiles, when pursuing hot females! I captured this shot of this single-minded buck just as the driver hastily slammed on his brakes.**





# **ORS** of the ***Whitetail RUT***

FOR A WHITETAIL BUCK, THE RUT CAN BE A DEADLY AFFAIR.

TEXT AND STORY BY

**MARK MORRISON**





## RIGORS OF THE WHITETAIL RUT

When bucks begin to mature into rut-worthy critters, they increase their rutting activities and gain confidence with each passing year. A 2½-year-old may chase does and paw out numerous scrapes, but he's not going to breed many does, as he's sure to bolt at the first sign of a larger buck. At this age, he will be content to stay in his home area where feed is nearly as important as mating, which makes his young life pretty safe — for the time being anyway.

At 3½, if he has good potential, bowhunters studying him through binoculars or game cameras will definitely take notice of his maturation. At this age, he'll enter the rut with more zeal, and he will be a willing participant in sparring and fighting matches with similarly sized bucks for the right to hang with an estrous female — at least until a real big boy chases him off. Barring injury from a battle, he'll remain locked into his familiar home range and survive another rut. Now comes the gambling age — 4½ years — where he is close to reaching peak rutting potential.

In my neck of the Minnesota woods, this is the age where vehicles cull-out many bragging-size bucks. You see, at this age, a buck's personality radically transforms and he seeks to move away

from other bucks to find new haunts. This can happen twice a year to mature bucks. The first time is just before they are ready to shed velvet, and the second is smack dab in the heat of the rut. Bucks that contentedly cruised their home ranges during past ruts are sparked by the changing hormones of full maturation to locate fresh, albeit relatively close, new areas to find does. Unfortunately, searching for solitude means crossing deadly roadways.

Interestingly, most of the bucks I've observed exhibiting this behavior have secreted away from high-density buck zones. In other words, a low buck-to-doe ratio has forced them out. It may seem at odds with some deer-management plans, but bucks seem to enjoy longer lives when the ratio of does is a little higher. Large whitetail bucks don't leave in fear of facing off against other big deer, but rather to find their own doe haven, and perhaps better feed.

What can you as a bowhunter do to keep a nomadic 4½-year-old or older buck glued to your property? Well, first you've got to determine whether the deer is likely to leave your hunting ground. Your scouting could reveal the buck is spending more and more time off your tract. If you believe so, then taking advantage of a shot opportunity when it arises could be smart. It's a gamble.

If you are hunting private land, or



These are the two bucks I described photographing while they were locked in mortal combat over an estrous doe. Use rattling frequently during the rut, and keep it loud to accurately mimic the din caused by fighting bucks.



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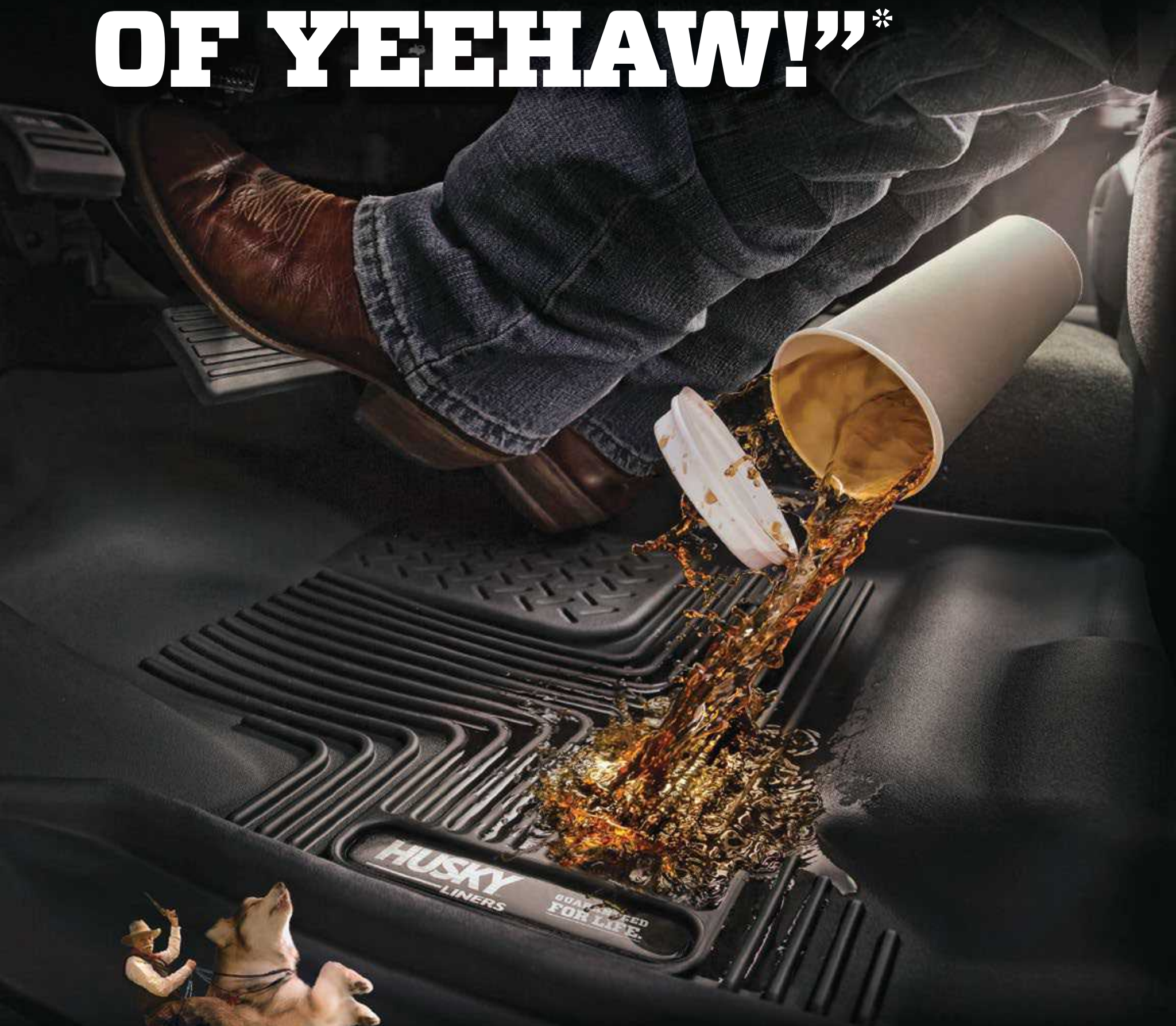
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## RIGORS OF THE WHITETAIL RUT

your own parcel, you may want to plant supplemental food plots, which could keep him happily fed as well as attract the does he'll chase in the fall. Perhaps the best solution is to give him secure cover that you don't tread during scouting and hunting trips. Other than that, it's basically up to Mother Nature and luck.

Many avid bowhunters have never seen a bona fide knockdown, drag-out buck fight. Oh, we've all seen light sparring matches and semi-serious battles, but viewing a killer bout is pretty rare. But, they do happen with frequency, most times under the cover of darkness. These clashes can result in injuries like antler tine-induced eye punctures, lung perforations, broken limbs, and skull penetrations! Rutting whitetail bucks are tenacious, hormone-infused critters that will, when matched against a similar rival, battle to the death over a hot doe.

This past November, I was set up in a cottonwood blowdown in a riverbottom rife with whitetail does. I hadn't sat very long when an estrous doe trotted by on a nearby terrain rise with a sizable 10-point buck in tow. She soon bedded

down in a thicket, with the swollen-necked suitor guarding her. Shortly, the buck went on high alert and issued a wet, nasally snort-wheeze, and then he stomped his front hooves solidly on the frozen earth! Moments later, a thick-necked and equally thick-racked 4x4 materialized from the brush and followed his perceptive nose towards the sexy aromas emanating from the thicket.

The enraged 5x5 was on him immediately, and the fight was on! The two combatants met with a deafening, bighorn-ram-like crash, as their antlers meshed and twisted against each other. The bucks spun like a roulette wheel run amok, tearing up brush and scattering ground litter with every turn. It was the longest fight I'd ever witnessed, and I nearly forgot to capture any images as the experience was so engrossing!

Apparently it was of interest to other deer, too, as several other bucks arrived and stood on the periphery to observe the fight. The 10-pointer finally ended the deadly fray by swiftly backing up in an arc, while crazily torquing his neck and raising his head. This rapid maneuver pulled his unlucky opponent completely off the turf and slammed him down onto the frozen ground with a sickening thud! The 5x5 shook himself free and backed off, panting with ex-



Here a nice 5x5 buck pants heavily with exhaustion after chasing does in nonstop fashion for many hours. Without good feed and water nearby, the physical strain of the rut can literally end a buck's life.



haustion and triumph. The 4x4 lay still for a moment, and then struggled to his feet and limped off in defeat. Did he survive? I really don't know. But I never saw him again. The onlooking bucks also took that as their cue to bolt. It was an amazing event to witness and photograph, and definitely one to learn from, too.

You see, it was the peak of the rut, or the so-called "lockdown" phase. Yet the sound of cracking antlers brought in several more nice bucks! My lesson here? Never forget to carry a set of rattling antlers, and use them during every phase of the rut. The din created by the battling bucks was considerable. That's another worthwhile lesson: Don't be afraid to mimic all sounds of a deer fight by loudly breaking brush and tearing up turf with antler tines. You really can't make too much racket when mimicking a buck death match!

Olympic-caliber athletes metabolize huge amounts of calories while training and competing, but that pales in comparison to the voluminous amounts of energy whitetail bucks burn through during the rut. Bucks will forego regular feeding when chasing does throughout the rut cycle. That time period is protracted for many bigger, mature bucks as they remain in a heightened rutting state from pre-rut on to the late or secondary rut, when some yearling does come into season for the first time. Unfortunately, this can lead to a life-threatening lack of nutrients and death once the rut ebbs. Bucks that only weeks before sported beefy muscular frames and oak-like swollen necks can be reduced to anemic, undernourished ghosts of themselves.

I've witnessed many bucks that have quickly withered and died after difficult months of rutting. Last season was one of the worst for post-rut fatalities, as a couple of my shed-hunting buddies and I found five monster deer dead on one 800-acre tract alone! Upon closer examination, none of the deer showed any obvious outward signs of trauma. We assumed that the rigors of the rut, including massive calorie loss, had done the deer in. Even exposure could have contributed, as that fall and winter was the fifth coldest and snowiest in Minnesota history. When a deer has to burn more calories traveling to feeding areas than can be consumed, his days are numbered.

Planting the aforementioned food plots will go a long way in preventing this scenario. These plots should be planned

carefully, so that they are planted in close proximity to thick, weather-insulating bedding cover. For example, if you plant crop rows adjacent to attractive bedding and browse cover, the deer won't have to traverse deep snow over long distances to get to the feed. Also, placing these food plots in your tread-free secure areas practically guarantees at least some bucks will remain not only until bow season closes but through the winter and on into the fall hunting months. This way, they'll be well nourished and equipped to take on the next rut.

Bowhunters whose aim is to track

bragging-sized whitetail bucks with concentrated scouting, sign interpretation, and the use of myriad trail cameras face many obstacles not related to the inherent edginess of arguably America's most elusive game animal. Being fully aware of what whitetail bucks endure during and after the rut will go a long way not only to keep deer on your hunting grounds but to up the odds on placing your tag on a healthy wallhanger! <<<

*The author is an outdoor photographer and writer from Mankota, Minnesota.*

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# ONE TO REMEMBER

STORY & PHOTOS BY

RON NIZIOLEK



**BIRDS WERE CHIRPING** as night turned to dawn on my fourth day of hunting whitetails in Kansas. Deer were moving in a distant hayfield, and I glassed up several bucks. But they all appeared to be headed for the CRP, and not in my direction. The riverbottom around my ladder stand remained quiet and still. The sun's rays eventually peeked through the branches to my left and helped ward off the morning chill. Eventually, I shed my jacket and continued my plan of an all-day sit.



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## ONE TO REMEMBER

I was preoccupied watching a couple of squirrels in a game of chase. When I looked to my right, a nice buck pushed a doe from the cedars to a fenceline bordering the hayfield. He looked big, and a quick glance through my binoculars sent my pulse up a few levels. The two deer were only 80 yards out, but it looked like they might jump the fence. I had just removed my bow from its hanger and clipped on my release, when the buck

suddenly mounted the doe. *Man, what a cool photo that would be*, I thought, as I quickly hung up my bow and fumbled to get my camera out of my pocket. Of course, as soon as I turned my camera on, the buck got down off the doe. I thought the show was over, but he mounted the doe again, and I was able to snap a couple of blurry photos through the branches.

Fearing the deer were about to jump the fence into the field, I turned my head and grunted a couple of times. I had their attention, and soon the doe headed



I snapped this photo of my buck mounting a doe right before I called him into bow range.

my way. I slipped my camera back into my pocket, and slowly got my bow ready again.

The doe was coming through a narrow lane to my right, with the buck slowly trailing 40 yards behind her. Once she got behind a cedar, I turned and prepared for the impending shot. I drew when the buck was still 30 yards out, and focused on his chest through the screen of branches. When he stepped into the shooting lane, my 20-yard pin was low on his shoulder. The arrow flashed away and disappeared with a hollow thump. The buck mule-kicked, and I heard him run maybe 20 yards and stop. I couldn't see the buck through the screen of cedars, but I could hear him coughing. I finally stood on the seat of my ladder stand, and on tiptoes, could see him wobbling. I was amazed he was still on his feet. Within seconds, he was down

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As you can see from this photo taken from my treestand, Kansas is pretty wide open. Fortunately, I had pretty good cover in front of me to hide my drawing motion.

and still. I was stunned. He looked much larger than my initial glimpse of him at 80 yards. I could see six points on one antler, and the mass was amazing. I actually shinnied up the tree another couple of feet, and by tilting my head and looking through one eye, I was able to see the matching six points on the other side.

I slumped down to my seat again with wobbly knees. With my heart racing and my hands shaking, I fumbled out a text to my buddies, Matt and Jason. It simply said, "Tagged out."

Matt was at work, and Jason was about two miles away in another tree. Immediately the responses were, "What did you shoot?" and "How big is he?"

"He's a 6x6," I texted back. It was ironic, because the night before on the way to town we had spotted a beautiful 6x6 locked down with a doe right off the road. Matt and Jason assumed it was the same buck, and they texted me and asked whether that was indeed the case. I responded, telling them that the buck I had just killed was bigger. They both congratulated me, and Matt told me he was on his way to give me a hand with the recovery.

I climbed down and paced off 18 yards to my bloody arrow. I took a photo and sent it to the guys. Then I approached the buck and stood there in complete awe of him. Six perfect points on each side, and more mass than I ever imagined a whitetail could have. I'm a diehard elk hunter by nature, but this buck was truly something special in my 30 years of bowhunting. I checked my shot placement, and again I was amazed that he had stayed on his feet as long as he did. Kneeling next to him was an emotional moment, and one that I relive each time I look at his antlers hanging on my wall.

This hunt actually began Wednesday night, November 5, when Jason Stafford and I left Cody, Wyoming, for an all-night drive to Kansas. We do this hunt every couple of years, thanks to our buddy Matt Palmquist. Matt heads west and hunts elk with us when he can, and he is kind enough to offer up some whitetail hunting for us Wyoming boys. We rolled up to Matt's house at about 8 a.m. and grabbed a few hours sleep since Matt was working until noon. Matt's buddy, Jesse Coots from New York, was also there, and he was chasing mule deer.

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## ONE TO REMEMBER

After Matt got us settled in our stands that evening, he went off in search of a large muley buck for himself. Jason and I had some good activity that evening, but neither one of us saw anything we wanted to shoot on the first day of a weeklong hunt.

Over the next few days, we hunted from stands and also did some spotting and stalking. It was incredible to see whitetails in this wide-open terrain,



(Above) When not in a stand or ground blind, we spent considerable time glassing for whitetails, then trying to put the sneak on them. (Below) It was amazing to see nice bucks like this out in the open and using yucca plants for cover and shade.



using yucca plants for cover and shade. Jason spent two hours stalking to within 30 yards of a great buck, but never was offered up a good shot angle. A doe bedded at five yards eventually winded him, ending his stalk.

After Matt showed up and we finished taking photos and field-dressing my buck, I spent time back at Matt's house caping the buck and boning out the meat for the drive home. A major cold front arrived with strong winds and

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**My hunting buddy, Jason Stafford, braved subzero temps for several days before finally tagging out on this nice 4x4.**

plummeting temps, and my hands were numb by the time I finished taking care of my deer.

Wondering how Jason was faring out in his treestand, I sent him a text asking if he needed to be picked up. He said he wanted to come in for a few minutes to gather up more clothes and handwarmers for the rest of the day. He was back in his stand by 1 p.m., and he sat for the duration of the day.

One morning, Jason and I tagged along with Jesse out to a walk-in area to help him relocate a great mule deer buck he'd seen the evening before. We spent hours glassing with Jesse, but we couldn't find the buck. We did locate some decent whitetails, but they were on private ground.

It was back to the stand that afternoon for Jason. He hunted in subzero temps until Thursday evening, when a great 4x4 gave him a good shot at 40 yards. I spent those hours trying to locate a big mule deer for Matt.

When it was all said and done, we had beaten the odds and taken a couple of P&Y-class trophies. That, along with time spent with Matt and his family, and our new friend Jesse, made for an incredible trip. As I'm writing this, I glance often at the antlers from my buck. No matter what future hunts have in store for me, this buck will always be one to remember. ««

*The author is a serious bowhunter who makes his home in Cody, Wyoming.*

#### **Author's Notes:**

My equipment on this hunt included a Hoyt Carbon Spyder 34, Easton arrows, G5 Striker broadheads, Zeiss optics, Schnee's boots, and clothing from Sitka Gear. Jason's equipment included a Prime Impact bow, Easton arrows, G5 Striker broadheads, and clothing from Sitka Gear.

Kansas is an affordable hunt. For a nonresident Kansas whitetail deer combo (buck and doe tags), you must apply in April for a specific unit and a second choice. If successful, you will be charged \$337.50. Don't forget to also purchase a \$71 hunting license once you receive a successful drawing notice. The archery season runs from September 15 to December 31, with the most effective rut dates revolving around November 10.

See page 80 for "When The Stand Or Blind Isn't Working"

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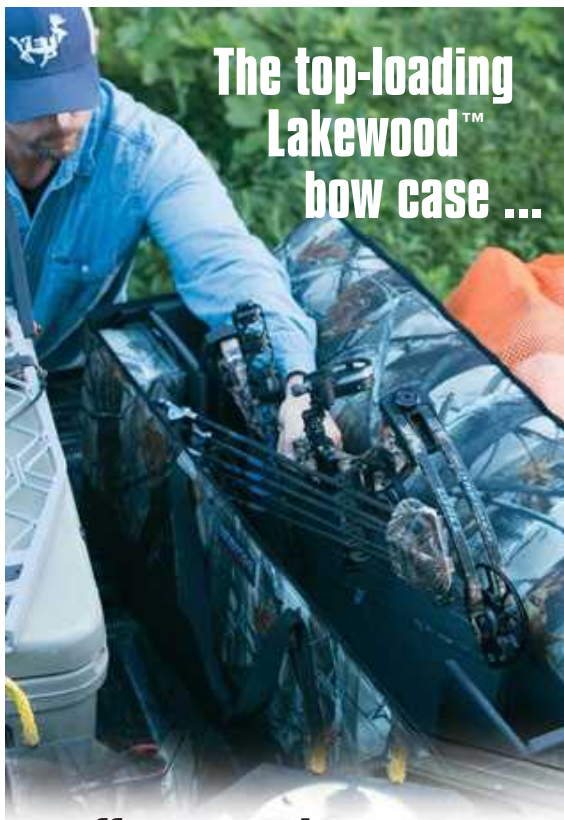
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## When The Stand Or Blind Isn't Working

I have to say that some of our more memorable times in Kansas were spent spotting and stalking whitetails in the yucca-covered hills. It was very similar to hunting Coues deer in Arizona, and we used many of the same tactics. We would take off on big looping walks, setting up tripods and intently glassing under and around every plant as new country unfolded before us. It was quite an education. These big Kansas whitetails can be just as difficult to spot as the diminutive little Coues.

Our strategy was to study maps and find road-less terrain with some topographic relief. Then we would hike out on a ridge, drop partway down on one side to avoid being skylined, and then patiently scour the countryside with our binos and spotting scopes. It is an agonizingly slow process, but necessary when all you are looking for are antler tips, a nose, or an ear. The beauty of this tactic is there is never any downtime, and it can be done all day long. We would pay close attention to any vantage points that could later be used to glass from at peak hours. As when hunting mule deer, we were always trying to position ourselves on a vantage point at daylight. Watching a buck bed for the day and then stalking him is much easier than just roaming blindly. Vantage points in Kansas are hard to come by, and often these vantage points were on top of oilfield tanks. Just 20 feet of vertical gain would often open up hundreds of additional acres for glassing.



Matt's friend, Jesse, is a master at this hunting method, and he showed us a few photos of great whitetails he had stalked to within spitting distance of, only to snap a photograph of the deer before continuing in his search for a muley buck. He is the main reason we even attempted this method for several days instead of sitting in stands or blinds. Both Jason and I are always willing to try new tactics and do whatever it takes to succeed. Many white flags were seen bounding over distant ridges before we learned to slow down our approach and became more efficient with our glassing. One final tip: While handholding binoculars can be effective, it pays to have a stable tripod system when glassing. You will spot far more animals. <<<







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**T**HE MOMENT I had been dreaming about since I first held a bow in my hand happened so fast it was surreal. We all know that our hunting fortunes can change in the blink of an eye. I had just tasted that truth as I stood in my treestand, alternating between thanking God and putting my hands on my head and exclaiming, "I can't believe that just happened!"

STORY & PHOTOS BY

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## VICTORY REDEFINED

I suspect many of you also share my same dream of knocking down a giant whitetail buck. Some of you may have been fortunate enough to have realized this dream already, but if not, know that if it can happen to a knucklehead like me, it can happen to anyone! The following is a story of how my perception of victory was redefined.

I lost my first and best hunting buddy, who was also my only brother, to prostate cancer. He was 10 years older than me, and amazingly his son, Matt, has stepped into the void his dad's departure created. Matt introduced me to bowhunting several years ago, and I have not picked up a rifle since. I was thrilled that he was with me to share in my greatest hunting victory.

Matt and I are loyal, proud Texans, but as we both began to grow in the sport and educate ourselves, it did not take long for our hearts to be pulled to the hardwoods of the Midwest. That desire eventually led us to Kansas seven years ago with high hopes and big dreams.

I distinctly remember the conversation Matt and I had with each other about the possibility that one day, if we were persistent and hunted hard, one of us just might take a 150, or even a 160-class, whitetail buck with a bow. I have enjoyed every minute of that pursuit, but I soon realized that true monster bucks are more common in your dreams and on TV hunting shows than in real life!

Greg Pickett is a landowner who put his land together with a few other farms to form a hunting club. The club has 10 members, including Matt, me, and my son, Hunter. We have fallen in love not only with the hardwoods, creekbottoms, and rich cropland that define our area, but also with the people who live and hunt there.

I started hunting there as a novice, but I have listened and



Here, members of our hunting club are relaxing and having a good laugh in our barn after dinner and a day of hunting.

learned from Greg and other talented longbow and compound archers in the club. I didn't know them initially, but I now consider all of them to be good friends. It is amazing how we pull for each other in our efforts, in the midst of the jabs and good-natured barbs directed at our all too common bowhunting misadventures!

**Bowhunter** columnist, C.J. Winand, has written that he feels like we hunt for three reasons: the thrill of the kill, the challenge, and the fellowship. I realize more and more each year that if you don't enjoy the process, or what C.J. calls the "challenge and fellowship," then you should pick an easier sport! If only the thrill of the harvest will satisfy you in your journey, I believe that not only will you be setting yourself up for disappointment, you will also be missing out on the best part of the journey.

My work schedule had cleared a couple of days earlier than expected, so I headed north hoping to catch the 2014 Kansas rut in full swing. I had snuck up to the Jayhawk State a couple of weeks earlier to scout, so I had some funnels and travel corridors in mind in which to hang my portable stand.

On the third day of the hunt, the wind was right for one of my spots. At midday, I walked down the railroad tracks and slipped over a fence into the creekbottom filled with giant



I parked my vehicle at this crossing and walked down these tracks 1,000 yards before carefully slipping into the woods to my stand.





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## VICTORY REDEFINED

red oaks and their bountiful acorns. In a few minutes, I had my climbing sticks in place and was sitting in my Lone Wolf stand, 16 feet in the air. I saw three bucks, but no shooters. I loved my setup, except for a huge, dead limb that blocked a great potential shooting lane. I removed the limb with my handsaw after dark, and then I quietly snuck out of the woods. On my way back to camp, I made one stop to recover an SD card from one of my trail cameras for later review.

Matt arrived that evening after a long drive from Austin. We had not been seeing any giants on our trail cameras, so after dinner I was excited to finally see a really great buck captured on the card I had picked up earlier. There was much debate on how big this buck was, but I sure thought he was a good one. His deep, split right G-3 looked like a “V,” so I named him “Victory.”

The next morning the wind was unchanged, so I slipped back down the familiar tracks with great anticipation and hope. I realize now that even a great stand is worthless if you can’t get in and



**“Victory” was the first really good buck we got on camera in 2014.**

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out without spooking deer. The railroad tracks offered a stealthy approach, but as I exited the tracks, I had a tricky 50 yards to navigate. This path was littered with potential “landmines,” such as loose railroad rocks and a brittle carpet of leaves that would explode if I was the least bit careless. So it took me a good 30 minutes to advance the final few steps to my stand.

Halfway there, I noted a young buck chasing a doe 40 yards in front of me. Frozen and undetected, I watched this play out for several minutes before they carried their courtship dance out of my view.

Finally on stand, I reveled in a perfect cool, crisp morning, progressively warmed by the sun's bright rays fighting through the foliage to hit the forest floor like shards of glass. The small drainage bottom I was in had large red oaks, burr oaks, and elms spaced perfectly for narrow shooting lanes, with a small creek about 60 yards away from me.

After only 30 minutes on stand, I looked up to see movement in the creek. I gently lifted my binoculars to identify a mature eight-point. I grunted and stopped him briefly before he began to walk away. I then spotted a doe that was leading him farther away, so in desperation I hit my bleat can and grunted once more. Suddenly, I noted something closer out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see what I had envisioned thousands of times in my dreams: A Kansas giant, unlike anything I had ever seen in the wild, was walking toward the shooting lane I had cleared only a few hours earlier.

I immediately noted many points and incredible mass, but my focus lasted literally less than a second, as his worth did not require further evaluation. It was all happening so fast that I didn't have time to panic or get nervous. I don't actually remember lifting my bow off its hanger,





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## VICTORY REDEFINED

or securing my release to my D-loop, but somehow I found myself locked and loaded almost instantly. I relocated my target walking briskly toward the calls he had just heard. He exhibited a determined posture that expressed to onlookers that this was his domain, and male intruders would not be tolerated. As he passed behind the last, all-too-narrow tree that stood between us, I carefully came to full draw. Is there a greater moment in bowhunting than coming to full draw on a shooter buck undetected? I found myself in that magical place.

In an instant, I leveled my bubble and focused on the smallest hair I could find behind the buck's left shoulder. The release occurred without a conscious thought. I remained totally entranced as I clearly saw my broadhead enter the exact spot I was aiming at 27 yards away, as if in slow motion. My target immediately spun and broke into a dead run toward the creek. After crossing the shallow water and rock bed 50 yards away, he suddenly slowed, stumbled, and then collapsed. I watched it all happen while clinging to my tree in disbelief.

I couldn't have given you any details about his rack at that point. However, I was as sure as I had ever been in my hunting life that there would be no ground shrinkage that day.

It had all happened so fast that only then did my heart begin to race. After calming down for 30 minutes and pinching myself intermittently, I descended to the oak-leaf carpet once again. I walked to the scene of the crime to see my arrow standing upright in the dirt, my fletchings stained red with the truth of what had just happened. A minute later, I was standing over my prize gift. My attention was first drawn to the mass, but then I spotted the split G-3 "V." I had just shot Victory!

At first glance, I knew he would be my biggest buck ever, but I could not allow myself to accept just how big he was at that point. I did feel certain that I had just taken that 160-class animal that Matt and I had dreamed about from the start. Back in camp, my buddies seemed as happy as I was, and a great celebration ensued. Matt took a P&Y-class eight-pointer two days later, adding to the joy of the week.

So I picked up bowhunting at age 51, and I killed a buck beyond my wildest dreams eight years later. Believe me, I know how lucky I am. The Boone and Crockett gross score was exactly 180 inches, with over 41 inches of mass and 17 scorable points. Because it did not have enough atypical points (15 required), it could not be scored as a non-typical, so after deductions it netted 149. I will most likely never see a fair-chase buck like this again, much less harvest one. As the experience has begun to sink in, a strange perspective has unfolded. I



Matt killed this P&Y-class buck two days after I arrowed Victory.

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## VICTORY REDEFINED

really never thought of my accomplishment in terms of personal expertise or talent. I just had an overwhelming sense of gratefulness. It was crystal-clear in an instant that I had done nothing different that day than I had on any other day. God simply allowed a giant buck to walk into my life. Yes, I had trained and practiced. I had also learned from my past mistakes and from hunters more experienced and talented than myself. However, I now fully realize that I can't control my "opportunities."

So what did I learn? Make no mistake, this was the greatest hunting moment of my life. But strangely, it was only when my "Victory" was secure that I fully appreciated the process of getting to that point. There is an old proverb that states, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord." How appropriate in this case! All we can control is the process of preparing for battle.

It is said that the rich are better off than the poor, because the rich know that wealth does not bring happiness. I am richer today because I am now certain that victory is sweet, and it was made all the sweeter because I made sure to enjoy the process along the way. My journey included new friendships, more time spent hunting with my family, and listening to God in the trees. My victory was redefined as I became more fully aware of how much I truly love planning, scouting, hanging stands, checking trail cameras, telling lies around the campfire, listening to the sound of crunching leaves beneath my stand in the dead silence of a hardwood forest, and those heart-pounding close encounters, no matter how they turn out! I am now even more committed to enjoying the process each day I have left in the woods.

I hope that this fall you harvest the buck of your dreams, like I did with "Victory." However, I believe if we can truly enjoy the pursuit and the fellowship along the way, we are already victorious. <<<

*The author is a surgeon who lives with his wife of 37 years, Gina, in Dallas, Texas.*

### AUTHOR'S NOTE:

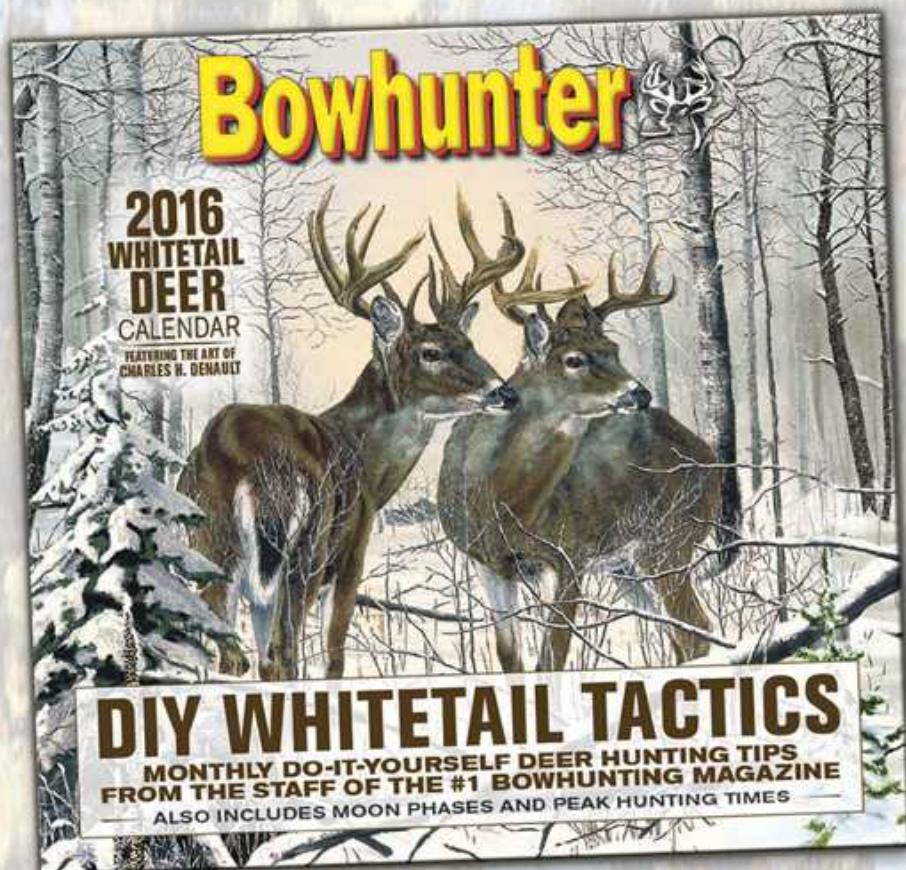
My equipment on this hunt included a Mathews Z7 bow, Victory VAP 350 arrows, Grim Reaper broadheads, QAD Ultrarest, Lone Wolf treestand, Leica binoculars, Leupold rangefinder, and clothing from ScentLok.



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Nikon Sport Optics, 1-800-645-6687, nikonsportoptics.com.

## Evolved® Introduces Deer Attractant

Raisin Cain™ (\$12.99/5-lb. bag) is a nutritious attractant from Evolved Habitats that deer can't resist. Made from roasted rice bran enhanced with real raisins, it is high in both protein and fat. Once deer get a taste of it, they will come back to it again and again. To help make it easier to find, Evolved has incorporated its new Glo-Cote™ UV-enhancement technology so deer can see it



and smell it. Use it to draw bucks in close during hunting season (where legal), and as a supplemental food source in winter. Contact: Evolved Habitats, (225) 638-4016, evolved.com.

## New Breed Archery Targets The Ladies

The New Breed Archery Seduction™ (\$889) was built to meet the ever-growing number of female archers and bowhunters. It clocks in at 285 fps and weighs 3.3 lbs. The slightly reflexed, fluted aluminum riser has stylish heart-shaped cut-outs and an attractive pink color scheme. The Bionix 2.0™ Modular Cam System has a two-track design, which provides shooters with a smooth draw and a



rock-solid back wall. Two versions — SV and XV — are available. The SV is 28½" axle to axle with a 5⅝" brace height and a 22½"–25" draw-length range. The XV is 28" long with a 5¾" brace height and a draw-length range of 25"–27". Both are available in peak weights of 30, 40, 45, 50 and 60 lbs., in your choice of Samurai Black or Muddy Girl® Camo. Contact: New Breed Archery, 1-888-363-3545, newbreedarchery.com.

## Browning Trail Cameras® Goes Full HD

The Recon Force™ Series camera (\$169.99) from Browning Trail Cameras has been updated to now give you even higher quality 10MP images. The video resolution was also upgraded to 1920 x 1080 full HD quality, which means you can play back video clips on a 60"-plus TV without losing any clarity. The infrared flash has a 100' range, and the detection range is 55'. Zero Blur Technology™ uses an ultra-fast shutter speed to eliminate motion blur when taking pics of moving



animals at night. The trigger speed is an amazing 0.67 seconds. It can take up to eight Multi Shot or Rapid Fire images per triggering (all images stamped with info that's important to hunters). The picture delay is programmable from 5 seconds to 60 minutes, and there's also a time-lapse mode (comes with Browning Buck Watch™ Timelapse Viewer software). It's powered by 8 AA batteries. Contact: Browning Trail Cameras, 1-888-618-4496, browningtrailcameras.com.

## All-Season Comfort From Huntworth®

Huntworth has added a lightweight Tactical Soft Shell Jacket (\$99.99) to its extensive line of hunting apparel. This midweight performance fleece top is great worn alone on active or early-to-midseason hunts, or as a layer in the late

## See Clearly With Nikon®

Nikon's MONARCH® 7 binocular series now includes two new scaled-down versions — 8x30 (\$379.95) and 10x30 (\$399.95). Both feature a compact 4.7"L x 4.8"W body and weigh just over 15 oz. The field of view for the 8x30 is 435' at 1,000 yards, and 351' for the



10x30. The 30mm models sport ED (Extra-Low Dispersion) glass and high-reflective, multilayer prism coatings for brighter images and colors. The lenses and prisms are multicoated, and the prisms are also phase-correction coated for higher resolution and better contrast. The turn-and-slide rubber eyecups provide more than 15mm of eye relief. Like all MONARCH 7s, these new additions are waterproof and fogproof. Contact:



# #1 Item You Should Be Hoarding...

## Bad news...

There are some people out there who think folks like you and me are a bit "odd".

They think having a stockpile ready for a disaster is something they can put off for "someday" or "never".

But those people are just hiding their heads in the sand. They are dead wrong -- and **you are dead right.**

You've seen the evidence and you know the situation is way too serious not to do something about it. When a crisis hits, you'll be ready. You'll make darn sure your family won't go hungry.

The fact is, if you don't take action or if you stockpile the wrong foods, you could be setting your family up to starve. It sounds harsh, but the truth is too many people with good intentions are making critical mistakes with their food stockpiles.

## MISTAKES LIKE...

- Buying MREs (meals ready to eat) with a 5 year shelf life (depending on where you buy them, they could be nearly expired)...
- Getting gross survival foods that taste terrible and are so high in salt, MSG and preservatives you could clog your arteries and get yourself sick...
- Or simply buying the wrong foods and leaving a critical hole in your meal plan, which means your family can become malnourished...

Well, I decided to stop worrying. Obviously, waiting for the government to give me a hand-out in a disaster just wasn't an option for me. And I was completely turned off by the crazy prices of survival food sold by most stores.

So I got in touch with my buddy Frank Bates and put my order in for his Food4Patriots survival food kits.

## This is Frank's new line of survival food:

- **Food4Patriots is an incredible value.** This high quality survival food is without any fillers or poor-quality "franken-food" that the other guys use to pad their survival meals. They are made and packaged right here in the U.S.A. You won't believe the prices on these kits -- a fraction of the price that other brands charge.
- There's no fancy packaging, it's military-grade sturdy stuff and can stand up to the crazy things that happen in a crisis. This food has a **shelf life of up to 25 years**, so you have complete peace of mind for the long term. And he's using the most compact kits so you can store them anywhere in your home without any extra hassle. They're sturdy, waterproof and stack easily. And extremely covert too.
- You can make these meals in less than 20 minutes; just add boiling water, simmer, and serve. I tried 'em and I think they **taste as good or better than any other survival food I've EVER had.** And you get a whole slew of choices for breakfast, lunch and dinner so you don't get stuck eating the same thing day-in and day-out.
- Frank has come up with some **impressive FREE bonuses** that are **ONLY** available to folks who purchase one of his kits on a first-come, first-served basis. For example, my 3-month kit came with 5,400+ heirloom survival seeds, 4 hard copy books, an 11-in-1 survival tool, and some other cool stuff.



*Protect your family in a crisis with 25-year shelf life survival food from [getfood56.com](http://getfood56.com)*

I want to make sure you don't miss out on this because **this is the #1 item to hoard today.**

Here's why... If you don't take action to get your food stockpile right now, you'll be in the same boat as the brainwashed masses who think "everything is fine." And if a crisis hits and your family asks, "What are we going to eat?" your mouth will go dry and you'll feel powerless.

But what if you decide right now to secure your food stockpile instead? Just **imagine how much better you'll feel right away.** And if a crisis hits and your family asks, "What are we going to eat?" you'll calmly reassure them that they're safe and they will have plenty to eat.

Listen, I can't predict the future. I don't know exactly when or how a crisis will hit. But from everything I see, it could be soon and it could be a big one. That's why I really want you to get the same peace of mind that I do.

*P.S. Got a call from Frank and you'll never believe who just tried to buy up his entire supply of food! You'll be shocked!*

**LOG-ON NOW TO [GETFOOD56.COM](http://GETFOOD56.COM)**



## WHAT'S NEW



season. It's constructed of three different material combos — durable, woven ripstop bonded to honeycomb fleece in the upper chest; 260-gram performance fleece bonded to honeycomb fleece for the main body; and unbound, 260-gram two-way stretch performance fleece at the elbows and forearms. Two roomy zippered pockets, a horizontal zippered chest pocket, high collar, and Oak Tree EVO® camo round out the features. Contact: Huntworth, 1-877-945-6837, huntworthgear.com.

### ScentBlocker® In New Mossy Oak® Pattern

The ScentBlocker Matrix™ Jacket (\$219.99) and Pants (\$199.99) are now sporting Mossy Oak's highly adaptable new Break-Up® Country® camo pattern. WindBrake™ Technology provides protection from winds up to 50 mph, and it does so without the noise of other wind-blocking fabrics. The lining is warm, quiet micro-fleece, and the shell is very resistant to burrs and briars. ScentBlocker's Trinity™ scent-control technology helps you get closer to game. The Jacket has non-slip patches on the shoulders for carrying your pack or bow



sling, two vertical chest pockets, and two lower zippered pockets. The Pants have an adjustable high-back waist, internal rubberized waistband, 20" leg zippers, and articulated knees. Contact: ScentBlocker, 1-800-397-1927, scentblocker.com.

### Tru-Fire® Offers Innovative Release Aids

The Chicken Wing™ (\$119.99) and ultra-padded Chicken Wing Max (\$129.99) hook-style releases have a Tru-Forward™ trigger and interchangeable single or double-trigger configurations. The dual-finger (index and middle finger) trigger gives you more control while reducing the tendency to "punch" the trigger. The compact head houses a spring-loaded, nickel-plated steel hook with an elongated profile to ensure good



contact with your D-loop. The Tru-Centering™ head settles naturally for perfect placement in your anchor point. Trigger travel is adjustable (factory set at 3 oz.), and upon release the hook returns to the draw position. Both have a leather buckle strap, and the Foldback™ Ring allows you to flip the release aid back 180 degrees, so it's out of the way when not in use. Contact: Tru-Fire, (920) 923-6866, trufire.com.

### Tired Of Being Cold On Stand?

Well, this innovative new clothing manufacturer out of Houston, Texas, just might have a solution for you — and it's high-tech. Using their patented My Core Control Technology™, which employs strategically placed electronic thermal devices (incorporated into the apparel at key pulse points like the chest and wrists), their Personal Thermal Control Products use the circulatory system like a radiator to adjust body temperature and provide relief from climate extremes. Check out their Heated Gear™ Lightweight Rut Season Jacket (\$239.99), heavier Unhooded Jacket (\$279.99), or their Hooded Parka (\$299.99), all in Mossy Oak® Break-Up® Infinity™. They also offer casual wear and soft shell jackets for winter sports.



Contact: My Core Control, (713) 900-1958, mycorecontrol.com.

### Duke Savora's Dream Still Alive

Radical Archery's Bryan Fry continues to keep Savora® broadheads alive and well, offering a full line of tough-as-nails heads with razor-sharp replaceable blades firmly seated in a variety of Savora-style locking systems. Savora broadheads were known for durability, and these new heads will impress with their blade/tip alignment, ferrule scalloping, sharpness, flight characteristics, and machining quality. The proven Ultra-Con™ 100 and 125 broadheads are immediately recognizable (think original Savora Contender), with blades locked at the chisel point, at the center snap ring,



and at the rear collar. The Ti-Con™ 100 and 125s feature one-piece titanium ferrules. The Triple Sec™ (for "Triple Security," referring to the blade-locking system) and MadMan™ series heads have unique double-scalloped points, and super-strong .030"-thick blades. And you can't miss with the new Titanium Signature Series™ collaborations with well-known bowhunters Anthony "Del" DelMastro (the DelMastro™ HPV100 features a long point and steep blade angles with up to a 1 3/16" cutting diameter) and Larry "Crazy Larry" VanDyke (the VanDyke™ LPS100 features solid .030" blades). Contact: Radical Archery Designs, Inc., SavoraArchery.com. <<<



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Tune in to "Brown and Down" the week of October 19 and follow long-time *Bowhunter Magazine & TV* Contributor Larry D. Jones as he joins Alaska native and close friend Dave Widby on a DIY bear hunt on Kodiak Island. Dave made a terrific stalk — and shot — on this bear. Larry filmed it all while searching for a big black-tail buck, thus the decoy hat...

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# Bowhunter® 2016 YOUTH HUNTER ESSAY CONTEST



Brought to you by Bowhunter Magazine and Double K Guide Service

Bowhunter Magazine has again joined with Double K Guide Service (Chris Keiser 515/991-5185, [www.doublekguides.com](http://www.doublekguides.com)) and a topnotch group of bowhunting equipment manufacturers to sponsor our 2016 Youth Hunter Essay Contest (see the list of sponsoring manufacturers below). This is our 20<sup>th</sup> annual essay contest, and we hope youth participants will make it another memorable one! Last year's 1<sup>st</sup> Grand Prize Winner, Carson Hallam, and his dad, Stuart, from Elizabeth, Colorado, spent three days chasing longbeards in South Dakota with Double K, and Carson killed his first-ever turkey. Congratulations to young Carson, as well as to the rest of the prizewinners from last year's contest, who we are confident are putting their new gear courtesy of our generous friends in the archery industry to good use. If you are in the market for new hunting equipment, please show your support for these companies and buy their products. They understand just how important youth hunters are to our sport.

Youth hunters, don't pass up this opportunity to enter Bowhunter Magazine's 2016 Youth Hunter Essay Contest! Here's how...



Last year's Grand Prize Winner, Carson Hallam, and his dad, Stuart, had a great time on their April 2015 South Dakota hunt.

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO ENTER?

To be eligible for the 2016 Youth Hunter Essay Contest, entrants must submit a 300-word essay on the following subject:

*"If you were mentoring a new bowhunter, what are the three most important lessons you'd teach your student?"*

Entrants must be between the ages of 12-17 as of March 1, 2016. Each entry must be accompanied by a cover letter telling us about your bow-and-arrow experience and interest in bowhunting. You'll also need an adult sponsor who will include a letter formally nominating you for the contest. The sponsor must also be willing to accompany you on the trip. Travel expenses for both of you will be covered.

Thanks to the following archery industry manufacturers who have donated bowhunting equipment to this contest. They share Bowhunter's passion for inspiring youth to bowhunt. (Be sure to check out the prize listing in the Official Rules for a rundown of the outstanding equipment that these companies have donated.)





#### OFFICIAL RULES

1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A purchase does not improve your chances of winning.  
2. Eligibility. **Bowhunter**,<sup>s</sup> 2016 Youth Hunter Essay Contest is open to teenagers who are between the ages of 12 and 17 as of the contest deadline of March 1, 2016, and who are legal residents of the fifty (50) states of the United States and the District of Columbia (excluding territories), and Canada (excluding Quebec), and who have an adult sponsor. Each entrant must be able to show certificate of having completed bowhunting education and safety training and be proficient with using a bow and arrow for hunting. Employees of **Bowhunter**, Outdoor Sportsman Group-Integrated Media, and Double K Guide Service ("The Sponsors"), and their subsidiaries, affiliates, advertising and promotion agencies and their family members and/or those living in the same household are not eligible to enter. The winner and adult sponsor must reside in the United States (excluding territories) or Canada (excluding Quebec) at the time the prize is awarded.

3. Entry. The entrant must write and submit an original short essay addressing the subject, "If you were mentoring a new bowhunter, what are the three most important lessons you'd teach your student?" together with a cover letter detailing the entrant's bow-and-arrow experience and entrant's interest in bowhunting. In addition, entrant must have an adult sponsor. The adult sponsor must write and submit a letter of introduction for entrant, in which the sponsor formally nominates entrant for the contest and explains the sponsor's own experience in archery/bowhunting. The sponsor also must agree to accompany the entrant on the bowhunting trip, should the entrant become the Grand Prize Winner.

All essays and letters must be typed and double-spaced. Essays must be no more than 300 words in length. All letters must be no more than one page in length. The letters and essay must contain the name, address, and telephone number of the writers. In addition, the entrant's cover letter should provide the entrant's birthdate.

All submissions should be mailed to: **Bowhunter**, Youth Hunter Essay Contest, 6385 Flank Dr., Suite 800, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17112. All submissions must be postmarked no later than March 1, 2016, to be eligible. Limit of one entry per person. All entries become the property of Bowhunter and they will not be returned.

**Bowhunter**, assumes no responsibility for lost, illegible, incomplete, mutilated, late, or misdirected entries, or those with inadequate postage, all of which will be void.

4. Selection of Winners. The contest will take place under the supervision of **Bowhunter**. Eligible essays will be considered by a panel of judges (the **Bowhunter**, Magazine editorial staff), who will score each entry and select winners based equally on essay content, grammar, theme, and presentation. Participants agree to be bound by these rules and the decisions of the judges, whose decisions are final. Winners will be selected by April 3, 2016, and they will be notified by first-class mail by April 17. Any alternate winners will be selected according to a schedule determined by the judges. The decisions of the contest judges regarding the method of selecting the winners are final and may not be challenged. To obtain a list of winners, after April 17 send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to **Bowhunter**, YHEC, 6385 Flank Dr., Suite 800, Harrisburg, PA 17112.

5. Prizes. 1<sup>st</sup> Grand Prize Winner will receive a 3-day Spring Turkey Hunt with Double K Guide Service in Gregory, South Dakota, with round-trip coach airfare for the winner and winner's adult sponsor to Sioux Falls, South Dakota (from gateway airport nearest winner's and adult sponsor's respective residences). A guide, whose decisions on all matters relating to the hunting trip are final, will accompany them on the hunting trip. **Bowhunter**, and Double K Guide Service ("The Sponsors") make no warranties with regard to prizes. Prizes are not transferable. No substitutions of prize allowed by winner, but The Sponsors reserve the right to substitute a prize of equal or greater value. Prizes are not redeemable by winner for cash value.

The estimated retail value of the hunt is \$1,145. Winner and winner's adult sponsor must provide their own hunting tackle and clothing and are responsible for all expenses not expressly stated above to be part of the prize, including all applicable taxes, meals, tips, ground transportation, game care or taxidermy, shipping fees, incidentals, and personal expenses. The prize may not be substituted and is not refundable, transferable, or redeemable for cash.

In addition, (130) runners-up will receive equipment prizes donated by sponsors. Prize distribution will be based on the final scores — second highest will receive First Prize, third highest will receive Second Prize, and so forth. 1<sup>st</sup> Prize: An Elite Bow from Elite Archery valued at \$950. 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A Mossy Oak Treestand unit from Ozonics Inc. valued at \$522.99. 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A full Under Armour Suit (jacket, shirt, pants, and hat) in Mossy Oak Treestand camo from Mossy Oak valued at \$500. 4<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Cruzor Bow package from Bear Archery valued at \$399.99. 5<sup>th</sup> Prize: An Ignite Compound Bow from Hoyt valued at \$399. 6<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Hype DT from Mission Archery valued at \$399. 7<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Gen-X camo hunting bow with kit (includes 3-pin fiber-optic sight, Whisker Biscuit rest, and detachable quiver with 4 carbon arrows) valued at \$300. 8<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Full Season Jacket and Pants from ScentLok Technologies valued at \$299.98. 9<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Barnett Recruit Crossbow valued at \$299. 10<sup>th</sup> Prize: A TACTACAM 2.0 Bow Package with Flat Black Stabilizer valued at \$289. 11<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Tek Hybrid Direct Mount Sight from Custom Bow Equipment valued at \$279. 12<sup>th</sup> Prize: A pair of 10" Grizzly Insulated Pac Boots (available men's whole sizes 5-15) from Kenetrek Boots (winner selects size) valued at \$275. 13<sup>th</sup> Prize: An Alpen Model 390 (camo) 10x42 binocular from Alpen Optics, Inc. valued at \$262. 14<sup>th</sup> Prize: An Alpen Model 393P (pink) 10x42 binocular from Alpen Optics, Inc. valued at \$242. 15<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Take-Down s2 Treestand with Standard Ratchet System from Advanced Treestands valued at \$239. 16<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Millennium L-100 Ladder Stand from Millennium Outdoors valued at \$239. 17<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Ranger X bow from Darton Archery valued at \$229.98. 18<sup>th</sup> Prize: A PlotWatcher Pro Time Lapse Trail Camera from Day 6 Outdoors, LLC valued at \$229. 19<sup>th</sup> Prize: A C275 Bowfile Elite from Lakewood Products valued at \$199.99. 20<sup>th</sup> Prize: An ICON Pro 1850 Pack and Suspension in Vias Camo from KUIU

Ultralight Hunting valued at \$199.98. 21<sup>st</sup> Prize: An Axe Action Cam from Wildgame Innovations valued at \$199. 22<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A pair of Rocky Broadhead Boots from Rocky valued at \$169.99. 23<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A TightSpot Quiver valued at \$162.95. 24<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Wrapped 3-Pin Right On Bowsight from Spot-Hogg valued at \$160. 25<sup>th</sup> Prize: A pair of AeroHead Boots from LaCrosse valued at \$150. 26<sup>th</sup> Prize: An Ameristep Ground Blind valued at \$149. 27<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Right Hand Black SmackDown PRO Fall-Away Arrow Rest from Trophy Taker, Inc. valued at \$139.99. 28<sup>th</sup> Prize: An HDX rest from Quality Archery Designs valued at \$139.95. 29<sup>th</sup> Prize: Two 50 ct. packs of PRINTZ feathers (winner's choice), a 1-oz. bottle of G1 glue plus a new DVD from Gateway Feathers valued at \$130.20. 30<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Pursuit Hunting Pack in Realtree Xtra from ALPS OutdoorZ valued at \$129.99. 31<sup>st</sup> Prize: A Pair of ThermaCELL Heated Insoles valued at \$129.99. 32<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A Rush FPRU5 5-pin Bowsight from Black Gold Premium Bowsights valued at \$129.95. 33<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A Scorpion Venom Kit including 2 each of Target Arrow Release Fluid, Polymeric Bowstring Fluid, Polymeric Bowstring Wax, Cam & Serving Lube, Anti-Venom Bowstring Cleaner, and Biscuit Spray valued at \$120. 34<sup>th</sup> – 36<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Dream Team combo decoy set (a Whitetail Buck and a Dreamy Whitetail Doe) from Montana Decoy Co. valued at \$119.99. 37<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Halo XRT Rangefinder from Wildgame Innovations valued at \$119. 38<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Ripcord Code Red Arrow Rest from Ripcord Technologies valued at \$116.63. 39<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Blazer Helix Jig, 36-Pack Blazer True Color Vanes, 13-Pack Neon/HD Wraps (standard size), Fletch-Tite Platinum and a Bohning Hat from The Bohning Company, Ltd. valued at \$114.63. 40<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Complete Scent Kit from Apparition Scents valued at \$100. 41<sup>st</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG6211B Range Rover Bowsight w/.019" pin valued at \$100. 42<sup>nd</sup> – 43<sup>rd</sup> Prizes: A dozen V-Force V-3 arrows from Victory Archery valued at \$99.99. 44<sup>th</sup> – 47<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Bowsmith Tool and Viscera Knife from Real Avid valued at \$99.98. 48<sup>th</sup> Prize: An HSS Hybrid-Flex Harness from Hunter Safety System valued at \$99.95. 49<sup>th</sup> Prize: An Assortment of Flexstone Game Calls valued at \$99. 50<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Cloak Trail Cam from Wildgame Innovations valued at \$99. 51<sup>st</sup> Prize: A 10" Feather Lite Hunting Stabilizer in Lost Camo from Specialty Archery, LLC valued at \$97. 52<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A Stealth Cam P12 Digital Scouting Camera from GSM Outdoors valued at \$89.99. 53<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A 6-pack of Maxima Red arrows from Carbon Express valued at \$84.99. 54<sup>th</sup> Prize: A CompCube Target from American Whitetail Targets valued at \$79.95. 55<sup>th</sup> – 56<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Bowmaster Set (includes a Bow Press and a set of Split Limb L Brackets) from Prototech Industries, Inc. valued at \$70. 57<sup>th</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG315J2 TRU-TEC LT Quiver valued at \$70. 58<sup>th</sup> – 59<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A 6-pack of Easton Axis Arrows from Easton Archery valued at \$69.99. 60<sup>th</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG855J TRU-TEC Carbon Pro Silencer valued at \$63. 61<sup>st</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG2511BC Speed Shot XS Boa (Junior) Release valued at \$62. 62<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A Youth Lifestyle Performance Hoodie and a Pair of Youth Hunting Gloves, Performance Fleece from Huntworth valued at \$61.98. 63<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A Youth ½ Zip Performance Fleece Pullover and a Pair of Youth Tri-Laminate Shooters Gloves from Huntworth valued at \$61.98. 64<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Little Bear Fanny Pack from ALPS OutdoorZ valued at \$60. 65<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Samurai Release from Scott Archery valued at \$60. 66<sup>th</sup> – 67<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Hero Release from Scott Archery valued at \$60. 68<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Walker's Game Ear Alpha Muff from GSM Outdoors valued at \$59.99. 69<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Western Rivers Mantis 75 Electronic Call from GSM Outdoors valued at \$59.99. 70<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Razor-Blaze Replacement Blade Knife from Outdoor Edge Cutlery Corp. valued at \$53.95. 71<sup>st</sup> – 76<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Bowhunter Magazine Prize Pack valued at \$50. 77<sup>th</sup> Prize: A WASP Rack Attack Broadhead Pack and a Camo Hat from WASP Archery valued at \$50. 78<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Core Midweight Mock from Sitka Gear valued at \$49. 79<sup>th</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG620B Storm Arrow Rest valued at \$49. 80<sup>th</sup> Prize: A ThermaCELL Repellent Unit, Holster and Refill from ThermaCELL valued at \$45. 81<sup>st</sup> – 83<sup>rd</sup> Prizes: A 3-Pack of Dead Ringer Broadheads valued at \$44.99. 84<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of Rage SS Broadheads from Rage Outdoors, LLC valued at \$44.99. 85<sup>th</sup> – 86<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A 3-Pack of Shape Shifter Broadheads from Innerloc valued at \$41.99. 87<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of Montec Broadheads from G5 Outdoors valued at \$41.95. 88<sup>th</sup> – 91<sup>st</sup> Prizes: A 4-pack of Magnum Broadheads from Slick Trick valued at \$40. 92<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A Dead Down Wind Value Hunter Kit valued at \$39.99. 93<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A Cyclops MEVO Spotlight from GSM Outdoors valued at \$39.99. 94<sup>th</sup> – 97<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A 4-pack of Killzone Broadheads from New Archery Products valued at \$39.99. 98<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Lifeline Climbing Rope System from Hunter Safety System valued at \$39.95. 99<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of RamCat 125-grain Broadheads from Smoke Broadheads valued at \$39.50. 100<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Firecel Handwarmer/Flashlight/Cell Phone Charger from Celestron Elements valued at \$39. 101<sup>st</sup> Prize: A Small BARK Silencer from Stealth Outdoors valued at \$36.99. 102<sup>nd</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of 100-grain Rexpid Big III Broadheads from Rexpid valued at \$34.99. 103<sup>rd</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of 100-grain Rexpid II Broadheads from Rexpid valued at \$34.99. 104<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of 125-grain Nuri Broadheads from Rexpid valued at \$34.99. 105<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of 125-grain Rexpid III Broadheads from Rexpid valued at \$34.99. 106<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 4-lb. bag of Imperial Secret Spot from Whitetail Institute valued at \$ 30.00. 107<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 4-lb. bag of Imperial Bowstand from Whitetail Institute valued at \$ 30.00. 108<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of Red NOCK OUT Lighted Nocks from Clean-Shot Archery valued at \$29.99. 109<sup>th</sup> – 111<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Wind Pro Mock Scrape System Package valued at \$29.99. 112<sup>th</sup> – 114<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A Stretchback Deer Grunt Call from Duel Game Calls valued at \$29.95. 115<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Stealth Strips Climbing Stick Kit from Stealth Outdoors valued at \$25. 116<sup>th</sup> Prize: A 3-pack of Nockturnal Lighted Arrow Nocks from Rage Outdoors, LLC valued at \$24.99. 117<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Stealth Strips Treestand Kit from Stealth Outdoors valued at \$20. 118<sup>th</sup> Prize: An All Season Scrape Kit from Tink's valued at \$19.99. 119<sup>th</sup> Prize: A TRUGLO TG395BR Bow-Jack valued at \$15. 120<sup>th</sup> Prize: A Crow's Foot Tree Stand Accessory Hanger from Hunter Safety System valued at \$12.95. 121<sup>st</sup> – 130<sup>th</sup> Prizes: A 3-pack of Camo face paint from CarboMask valued at \$11.99.

6. Sponsor Rights. All entries and requests become the property of The Sponsors and will not be acknowledged or returned. The Sponsors will have the right to photograph the winner. Entry constitutes permission to use the winner's name, picture, likeness, and city and state or provincial

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9. Claiming Prizes. Prizes must be claimed by April 30, 2016. Failure to execute and return any requested document within 10 days of postmark, or return notification of prize as undeliverable may result in forfeiture of prize. Alternate winners will be selected at the sole discretion of The Sponsors. All reasonable effort will be made to contact winners.

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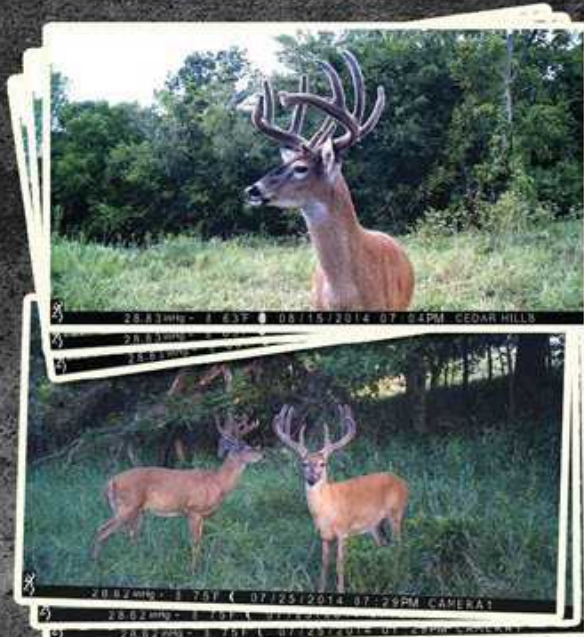
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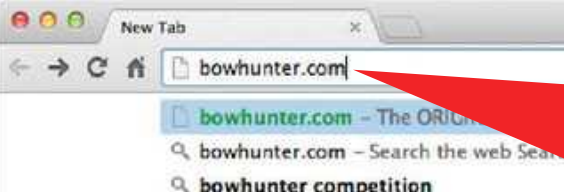
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NINE LED ALUMINUM  
FLASHLIGHT

LOT 69052 shown  
69111/62522/62573

**\$6.99**  
VALUE

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### SUPER COUPON

**SAVE 55%**

## 3 GALLON, 100 PSI OILLESS AIR COMPRESSORS

**A. HOT DOG STYLE**  
LOT 69269/97080 shown

**B. PANCAKE**  
LOT 95275 shown  
60637/61615

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**\$39.99** REG. PRICE \$89.99

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### SUPER COUPON

**HFT**

## 7 FT. 4" x 9 FT. 6" ALL PURPOSE WEATHER RESISTANT TARP

LOT 69249/69115/69137  
69129/69121/877 shown

**SAVE 55%** **\$3.99**  
REG. PRICE \$8.99

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### SUPER COUPON

**PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE**

## RAPID PUMP® 3 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

LOT 69227/62116/62584  
62590/68048 shown

**SAVE \$80**

**\$79.99** REG. PRICE \$159.99

• Weighs 74 lbs.

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### WOW SUPER COUPON

**SAVE OVER \$182**

## US★GENERAL PRO 30", 5 DRAWER TOOL CART

• 704 lb. Capacity

LOT 95272 shown  
69397/61427

**\$167.23** ~~\$189.99~~ REG. PRICE \$349.99

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### SUPER COUPON

**BADLAND**

**SAVE \$90**

## 2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL

LOT 61258 shown  
61840/61297/68146

**\$59.99** REG. PRICE \$149.99

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### WOW SUPER COUPON

**SAVE 42%**

## 20-60 x 60mm SPOTTING SCOPE WITH TRIPOD

LOT 62774  
94555 shown

**\$39.99** ~~\$49.99~~ REG. PRICE \$69.99

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### SUPER COUPON

**WARRIOR**

## 29 PIECE TITANIUM NITRIDE COATED HIGH SPEED STEEL DRILL BIT SET

LOT 5889/62281/61637 shown

**NEW \$13.99** REG. PRICE \$24.99

**SAVE 44%**

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### SUPER COUPON

**HaulMaster**

## TRIPLE BALL TRAILER HITCH

LOT 61913 shown  
69874/61914

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### SUPER COUPON

**THUNDERBOLT solar**

## 45 WATT SOLAR PANEL KIT

LOT 62443  
68751 shown

**SAVE \$160**

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### WOW SUPER COUPON

**PREDATOR GENERATORS**

## 4000 PEAK/ 3200 RUNNING WATTS 6.5 HP (212 CC) GAS GENERATORS

• 70 dB Noise Level

LOT 69729/68528/69676 shown  
LOT 69675/69728 CALIFORNIA ONLY

**\$299.99** ~~\$339.99~~ REG. PRICE \$499.99

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### SUPER COUPON

**Bunker Hill Security®**

## HANDGUN SAFE/VAULT

LOT 61581

**SAVE \$80**

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**PITTSBURGH**

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**SAVE 62%**

**SAE** LOT 69043  
42304 shown **\$5.99**

**METRIC** LOT 42305  
69044 **\$8.99**

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# Holiday Gift Guide

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**1-844-GAMECAM**  
**Kodiakcamera.com**



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**Missionarchery.com**



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**Mathews, Inc.**  
**Mathewsinc.com**



## SLASH Arrows

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Ready to explode — don't shoot!



Calm and relaxed — take the shot!

*By Curt Wells, Editor*

**Q** I see lots of questionable hits on television, but to be fair, I think most are the result of animals reacting to the shot and moving before the arrow gets there. How do you deal with animals “jumping the string?”

C. Wagner, Pennsylvania

**A** Sooner or later, every bowhunter deals with this problem. I define “jumping the string” as the act of an animal reacting to the sound of the bow being released. The instinctual reflex causes the animal to drop into a squatting position to load its leg muscles prior to taking flight. In rare cases, when the animal is close and intently staring at the fully drawn bowhunter, they may react to the *sight* of the bow going off, giving them a head start. It takes very little stimuli to get a nervous animal moving.

I was a victim of this phenomenon last fall, when I released an arrow from a blind at a bull elk at 35 yards. Video showed the bull did not move until the arrow was approximately five yards from him, which is indicative of his reaction time. Had he stood still, the shot would have been perfect. Instead he dropped about 15 inches, and my arrow passed through him above his spine, leaving him with nothing but a flesh wound. I did everything right. Or did I?

The bull knew something wasn't as it should be. He was on edge. Suspicious. When he heard my bow go off, he simply reacted. He didn't suspect a hunter, or know an arrow was on the way. Those are concepts an animal doesn't comprehend. He heard a noise, didn't like it, and he bolted.

Four things factor into this equation: game species, attitude, distance and arrow speed, in that order. Let's look closer.

**Game Species** — Each animal is an individual, but some species of game are more high-strung and more likely than others to alter your shot. Of the 24 species of big game that I've hunted, I would put Coues deer, impala, and pronghorns at the top of the “most likely to jump” list. They have explosive nerve endings that ignite at the slightest provocation. Whitetails are right up there too, followed by mule deer and elk. At the bottom of the list are bears, caribou, kudu, moose and muskox, in that order. The rest fall somewhere in between.

**Attitude** — The attitude or mood of the animal is important. Relaxed or distracted animals — a bull elk raking a tree, a pronghorn rubbing his face on a sage bush, or a whitetail working a scrape — are less likely to jump. Alert or tense animals looking at your position present a higher risk of moving before your arrow gets there. Avoid stopping any animal with a noise, unless absolutely necessary. All it does is put them into the first stage of liftoff.

**Distance** — Distance is a factor. A Coues deer or impala may be able to alter your pointblank shot, but few other species can get out of the way of a shot under 20 yards. Beyond that, anything can happen. Sound travels at 1,126 fps, or about four times faster than a hunting arrow. Now, there is a point of diminishing returns. If the distance is longer, say 40 yards and beyond, or there is ambient noise like wind or flowing water, an animal is less likely to hear the bow and could fail to react at all. Every opportunity requires forethought on whether the animal could alter your shot.

**Arrow Speed** — The consequences of arrow speed are minimal, unless there is a significant difference. Traditional archers shooting arrows at 170 to 210 fps have a definite disadvantage when compared to 270 to 310 fps arrows out of a compound. However, because we're talking about fractions of a second, a 20 or 30 fps difference between similar bows is not likely to make the difference between a lethal hit and something less.

Truth is, there's no way to predict whether an animal will jump the string. Some explode; others stand like a statue until impact. However, if you judge each situation based on these factors, you'll be better able to decide whether to aim right on, aim low in the vitals, or even shoot at all. <<<

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS





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